

*Printed 3*

T H E  
M A I N A R G U M E N T

Of a late B o o k, Intitled,  
*Christianity as Old as the Creation,*  
*K*  
Fairly Stated and Examined.

O R, A  
Short View of that whole Controversy:  
*The author Mr. Atkey*

Δεῖ μὲν γὰρ ἀμείλει τῆς περὶ Θεῶν δόξης ὥσπερ ὁ φεως λήμην ἀφαι-  
ρεῖν τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν· εἰ δὲ τῷτο ἀδύνατον, μὴ συνεκκόπῃεν·  
μηδὲ τυφλῶν τὴν πίστιν ἢν οἱ πλείστοι περὶ Θεῶν ἔχουσιν.

PLUTARCH.



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T H E

P R E F A C E.

**T**HE following Papers were drawn up, and in a manner finished, about fifteen Months ago; soon after Christianity as old as the Creation first fell into my Hands. Of the several Answers to it which have appeared in the World, I had then only seen those of Mr. Foster, and of the Author of the second Letter to a Deist. To the judicious Writings of both these Gentlemen, I thankfully own my Obligations for a great deal of Light on this Argument. What hath since been added by many other ingenious and learned Pens, may be thought to render the Publication of these Sheets superfluous.

But when it shall be considered that most of these Authors, are either of a larger Size than is suitable to the Generality of Readers, or

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have

*have confined themselves to a few particular Branches of the Dispute; and that what is here offered, is delivered in a different and more concise Method; and that it has the Advantage of an impartial Abstract of the Book, which has occasioned this whole Controversy: When these Things, I say, shall be considered, it is presumed this small additional Treatise will not be looked upon as entirely unnecessary.*

*But submitting this to the Judgment of the intelligent Reader, it may not be amiss to add a few Words, concerning something else, which the judicious will, perhaps, think more deserving an Apology. I mean, that ambiguous, and, as I know, some think, improper Manner, in which, with the generality of Writers, I continue to speak concerning the Law of Nature. It has been suggested, ' That by this Phrase we ' sometimes mean absolutely, that eternal, ' immutable, perfect Rule, which results from ' the Reason of Things, and is supposed to be ' independent of any Judgment Divine or ' Human; but that at other Times we use it ' relatively, to signify the Law of Man's Nature, that is to say, so much of that Rule ' above-mentioned, as Mankind in general, or ' particular Men in the Circumstances wherein ' they are, can discover to be right, which is ' their Law of Nature. That this ambiguous ' Use of the Phrase has given Advantage to ' the Adversary, and may occasion some Mistake ' or Perplexity to the Reader; upon which ' Account*

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‘ Account it is judged more proper to lay aside  
 ‘ this Ambiguity, by confining the Phrase Law  
 ‘ of Nature, to the Nature of the Beings, con-  
 ‘ cerning whom we are speaking; and that  
 ‘ particularly, when we are speaking of Men,  
 ‘ we should restrain it to the Law of their  
 ‘ Nature, which must ever result from the  
 ‘ Circumstances they are in at any Time. For  
 ‘ the Law of Nature, in the former absolute  
 ‘ Sense, can only be a Law to the Supreme Be-  
 ‘ ing, to whom alone it is perfectly known.’

As to the Matter of this Objection, I freely  
 acknowledge, ‘ That the Law of Man’s Nature  
 ‘ must ever arise from the Circumstances he is  
 ‘ in at any time; that every Man must be ca-  
 ‘ pable of discovering that Fitness of Things,  
 ‘ which obliges him, and is his Law of Na-  
 ‘ ture; and that in this Sense, the Law of  
 ‘ Nature cannot be improved, though our Ca-  
 ‘ pacities may.’ And I have, in all my Rea-  
 sonings, proceeded upon this Hypothesis. But  
 though no particular Man can be obliged to act  
 otherwise, than as the Fitness of Things are  
 discoverable by him, in the Circumstances  
 which he is under; and that only, properly  
 speaking, can be a Law to him: Yet, as the Fit-  
 ness of Things is what it is, independent of any  
 Judgment Divine or Human; and the acting  
 according to that Fitness, has usually been call’d,  
 acting according to the Law of Nature; I  
 confess I do not see the Necessity of receding  
 from the common Forms of Speech. Some Term  
 we must have to express the Standard, from  
 whence



*whence Actions are to be denominated, right or wrong, the common Rule of Action to God and Man. This has usually been called the Law of Nature, which results from the Fitness of Things. As this Fitness can perfectly be understood by an infinite Mind only; such a one, alone, is obliged to an exact Compliance with it. All other Rational Agents are bound to be conformed to this Standard, only so far as they are capable of discovering it. But still, be it discovered, or undiscovered, there is a Right and a Wrong in Actions; some are in their own Nature fit, and others unfit; and whatever Being swerves from that Rectitude, may properly enough be said to act contrary to the Law of Nature; though, if he doth it ignorantly and involuntarily, it is not to him imputable as a Fault. For this Reason, I apprehend, it is not absurd, when speaking of Man in general, or any particular Man, to talk of the Law of Nature absolutely; because though, with respect to such it is not a Rule of Duty, it is still a Rule of Right: Otherwise Right and Wrong will be no settled Things, but be varied with the Judgment of every Man; which no sober Person will assert.*

*It is possible, indeed, that this ambiguous Use of the Phrase Law of Nature, may occasion some Mistake to an unattentive Reader. Nor am I ignorant that the Author of Christianity as old as the Creation, has taken the Advantage of this Ambiguity, by shifting the Sense of the Phrase, as his Purpose required. Thus, when*

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*when he would prove the Perfection and Immutability of the Law of Nature, it is used in the first Sense ; and when he would shew the Clearness and Universality of the Law of Nature, he constantly useth it in the latter.*

*I think the Fallacy of his Argument may easily be shewn, by distinguishing between these two different Acceptations, and making it appear that there is no arguing from one to the other, as I have endeavoured to do. But after all, if any one is of Opinion that it will be better to avoid this Ambiguity, either in the manner above-mentioned, or else by calling the former the Rule of Nature or Standard of Action, and the latter a proper Rule of Life ; I shall not oppose it.*

*I add no more, but my best Wishes, that the Publication of these Papers (which by many Accidents has been so long delayed) may be of Service to establish that excellent, rational and pure Religion, that, I hope, I have proved the Religion of Jesus to be.*

T H E

# THE SPEAKER

It is well known that the Speaker of the House of Representatives is the chief officer of the House, and is elected by the members thereof. He presides over the House, and is the representative of the House in all its relations with the Senate and the Executive.

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T H E  
M A I N A R G U M E N T

Of a late B o o k, Intitled,

*Christianity as Old as the Creation,*

Fairly Stated and Examined.



THE Adversaries of Revelation have for some time very industriously set themselves to subvert Christianity. With this View they have attacked the Evidence from Prophecy and Miracles, and attempted to shew the Insufficiency of both these Arguments to support Revealed Religion. But the Author of *Christianity as old as the Creation*, hath with great Subtlety applied himself to overthrow the internal Evidence of the Scripture Revelations, either by denying the Morality of the Precepts, (to which Purpose he hath brought together a great Number of Objections, chiefly from the Old Testament,) or else by making use of the Morality, which he allows in the greatest Part of the New Testament Precepts, as an Argument against itself. And though I cannot say, that he

B

has,

has, in my Judgment, executed his Design with equal Learning and Acuteness to some others that have gone before him in the same Cause (a) ; yet it must, I think, in Justice, be allowed, that he has thought of a Method, by which this Controversy may be brought to the shortest Issue, as he hath offer'd what may be called an Argument *a priori* against the Fitness and Expedience of Revelation in general. For if it could be demonstrated from the Principles of right Reason, that all traditional Religion is needless, that it is contrary to the Law of Nature, and inconsistent with the Happiness of Mankind, (all which Things our Author pretends to make out,) if these Things, I say, could be made out as easily as they are asserted, we should be excused from the Trouble of examining the Evidence of any particular pretended Revelation ; and without further Enquiry might be satisfied that there could be no such Thing.

The Consideration of the Difficulties which he hath collected from some Parts of Scripture, I shall leave to others. But as for his main Argument against the Expedience or Use of Revelation in general, I am willing to join Issue with him. And that it may more easily be seen on which Side the Truth lies, I shall,

I. Fairly state this Author's Argument in the full Force of his own Expressions: and then,

II. In as plain and brief a Manner as I am able, represent what I take to be the true Answer to it.

The whole Strength of his Argument may be comprized in the following Propositions.

I. ' That from the Notion of God, as a Governor, and Mankind, as the governed, it necessa-

(a) Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion. Literal Scheme of Prophecy considered.

‘ rily follows, that there must always have been  
 ‘ some *Law*, by which he governed Men, visible  
 ‘ at all Times to Mankind, and so fully promul-  
 ‘ gated to them that they could have no just Plea  
 ‘ from their Ignorance not to be tried by it (b). ’

II. ‘ That as the only Design of God, in crea-  
 ‘ ting Mankind, was to make them happy; so He  
 ‘ cannot be supposed to have any other Intention  
 ‘ in the giving them a Law; and consequently that  
 ‘ He can require nothing of them, but what makes  
 ‘ for their Happiness, and can forbid them only  
 ‘ those Things which tend to their Hurt (c). ’

III. ‘ That the *Law of Nature* is such a *Law*,  
 ‘ requiring nothing but what is morally Good, for-  
 ‘ bidding nothing but what is morally Evil: That  
 ‘ it takes in all those Duties which flow from the  
 ‘ Reason and Nature of Things, and the Rela-  
 ‘ tions we stand in to God and our Fellow-  
 ‘ creatures; but leaves those Things, that can  
 ‘ only be considered as Means, (and as such  
 ‘ are in their own Nature mutable,) to human  
 ‘ Discretion, to determine as it thinks most con-  
 ‘ ducing to these Things, which are in their own  
 ‘ Nature obligatory (d). ’

IV. 1. ‘ That all Mankind, in all Times and Pla-  
 ‘ ces, by the Use of these Faculties which distin-  
 ‘ guish them from Brutes, *viz.* their Reasoning  
 ‘ Powers, are capable of discovering this Law of  
 ‘ Nature (e). ’ 2. ‘ That in the observing sin-  
 ‘ cerely this Law, consists the whole of natural  
 ‘ Religion, which was, and is, and ever will be  
 ‘ sufficient to make Men acceptable to God (f);  
 ‘ — 3. And that every equal Degree of Sincere-  
 ‘ rity in the Observation of it, will entitle Men  
 ‘ to an equal Degree of Divine Favour (g). ’

(b) P. 10. (c) P. 14, 15. (d) P. 115. (e) P. 5. (f) P. 3.  
 (g) P. 2, 3. 415.



V. ' That the Religion of Nature is rightly  
 ' calculated for an universal Religion, level to the  
 ' Capacities of all reasonable Creatures, a Law  
 ' written in their Hearts, which does not depend  
 ' on the uncertain Meaning of Words and Phrases  
 ' in dead Languages, much less on Types, Meta-  
 ' phors, Allegories, Parables, or on the Skill or  
 ' Honesty of Transcribers (not to mention Tran-  
 ' slators) for many Ages together; but on the  
 ' immutable Relations of Things always visible to  
 ' the whole World (*b*): And that accordingly, the  
 ' Reason of all Men, every where, as naturally  
 ' and necessarily assents to it, as all Animals con-  
 ' spire in the Pulse and Motion of their Hearts and  
 ' Arteries, or as all Men agree in their Judge-  
 ' ment concerning the Whiteness of Snow, or  
 ' the Brightness of the Sun (*i*). '

VI. ' That the *Law of Nature* is the *Law of*  
 ' God; and for that Reason must be like its Au-  
 ' thor, perfect and immutable, without the least  
 ' Defect, and incapable of having any Thing,  
 ' added to it, or taken from it. (*k*). ' Consequently,

VII. 1. ' That external Revelation (if any such  
 ' there be) cannot differ from Natural Religion,  
 ' but in the Manner of its being communicated (*l*):  
 ' That it can require nothing which that does not  
 ' antecedently require; and can forbid nothing  
 ' but what that has forbidden. 2. That ex-  
 ' ternal Revelation cannot be considered as  
 ' erecting upon the Foundation of Natural Re-  
 ' ligion, a nobler and larger Edifice, by ex-  
 ' tending it to such Things, as the Light of  
 ' Nature could not reach, without contradicting  
 ' any Thing it teaches; because, (besides what  
 ' has been already proved, that the Law of Na-  
 ' ture is so perfect that nothing can be added to

(*b*) P. 64. (*i*) P. 374. (*k*) P. 3, 4, 20. (*l*) P. 3.

it,) if our Natural Notions of the Divine Per-  
 fections demonstrate that God will require no-  
 thing of his Creatures but what tends to their  
 Good ; whatsoever is of this Kind, is a Super-  
 structure that belongs to the Law of Nature :  
 Or, in other Words, what the Reason, or Na-  
 ture of the Things themselves plainly point out  
 to us ; and for all other Matters, which have no  
 such Tendency, Men must seek another Founda-  
 tion, very different from the Divine, to build  
 their Hay and Stubble upon (m). 3. And lastly,  
 That whereas it may be objected, *That though*  
*it were granted, that Natural and Reveal'd Re-*  
*ligion, as they are supposed to have the same Au-*  
*thor, must have the same Ends ; and that the*  
*ultimate End of all God's Laws, and consequently*  
*of all Religion, is human Happiness ; yet there*  
*are several things to be consider'd as subordi-*  
*nate Ends, and that here Original and Tra-*  
*ditional Religion may differ ; since 'tis allow'd*  
*by all, that how immutable soever these subor-*  
*dinate Ends are, yet the Means to promote these*  
*Ends are various and mutable :* That to this  
 Objection it may be answer'd, That the allow-  
 ing these Means to be various and mutable,  
 supposes no such Means so prescribed by Reve-  
 lation ; but that, agreeably to the Law of Na-  
 ture, they are to be varied as best suits that  
 End for which they were ordain'd. 4. That to  
 imagine the contrary, is to make Things depen-  
 dent on Circumstances, independent ; Things that  
 are proper only under some Circumstances, ne-  
 cessary under all Circumstances ; nay, to make  
 Ends mutable, and Means immutable ; and that  
 these are to continue the same, though by  
 Change of Circumstances they become prejudi-

‘ cial, nay, destructive to the End for which  
 ‘ alone they were ordain’d. 5. That the more  
 ‘ necessary any End is, there is the more Reason  
 ‘ for People to be left at Liberty to consider in  
 ‘ the vast Variety of Circumstances, and those too  
 ‘ perpetually changing, what Means may be most  
 ‘ proper for obtaining that End ; since these  
 ‘ having no worth in themselves, can only be  
 ‘ valu’d according as they more or less conduce  
 ‘ to the Purpose they were intended for ; and  
 ‘ where God does not interpose, it is incumbent  
 ‘ on human Discretion, chiefly ordain’d for this  
 ‘ End, to make such Alterations as the Reason  
 ‘ of Things requires (*n*). 6. That those Means  
 ‘ which at one time promote human Happiness,  
 ‘ equally promote it at all times. And that, with-  
 ‘ out denying that God at all times intended Man-  
 ‘ kind that Happiness their Nature is capable of,  
 ‘ we must allow, that at all times He has given  
 ‘ them the Means of obtaining it, and consequent-  
 ‘ ly those Rules must have been discoverable at  
 ‘ all times. 7. That if God acts upon Rational  
 ‘ Motives, the same Motives which oblig’d Him  
 ‘ to discover any Thing that is for the Good of  
 ‘ Mankind, would oblige Him to discover every  
 ‘ Thing that is so ; and that too after the same  
 ‘ plain manner : and not do this, as it were, grudg-  
 ‘ ingly, little by little ; here a bit, and there a  
 ‘ bit ; and that to one favourite Nation only, un-  
 ‘ der the Veil of Types, Allegories, &c. and at last,  
 ‘ though He discover’d some Things more plainly,  
 ‘ to do it but to a small Part of Mankind, the  
 ‘ Bulk of them being suffer’d to remain in deplo-  
 ‘ rable Ignorance (*o*). Consequently,  
 ‘ VIII. ‘ That if Natural Religion was not abso-  
 ‘ lutely perfect, but requir’d the Assistance of

(*n*) P. 104, 105. (*o*) P. 393, 394.



external Revelation; such a Revelation being alike necessary in all Times and Places, should have been bestowed upon all. Otherwise God will be supposed to act as an arbitrary and partial Being (p). But that there never having been any such extensive Revelation so much as pretended, and, as far as we know, there being no Traditional Religion which, excepting in Name, has continued the same for any long Time; it follows that Natural Religion is sufficient of its self; and that if there ever was a Time in which it is allowed to be sufficient, it must always be allowed to continue so, except we suppose that God at last acted the Tyrant, and imposed such Commands, as the Relations we stand in to Him, and one another, no ways require.

IX. 1. ' That the supposing Things merely positive to be the Ingredients of Religion, is inconsistent with the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind: For that on whatsoever Account we suppose Things of a positive Nature are commanded, it will be found to reflect on the Honour of the Divine Being. 2. If we suppose that He enjoins such Precepts arbitrarily, He will then be represented as an arbitrary Being, that is, a Tyrant; and Mankind, of consequence, be supposed to be in the most miserable Condition. Since an arbitrary Will might change every Moment, and those Things which entitled Men to God's Favour to Day, might make them incur his Displeasure to Morrow: Nay he might at the same time have a Secret Will opposite to his Reveal'd Will; or have different Wills for every different Person; or might reveal his arbitrary Commands so ob-

'scurely, as to cause the utmost Confusion; and  
 'while we conceive of the Deity as an arbitrary  
 'Being acting out of Humour and Caprice, 'tis  
 'not in our Power to love Him (*q*). 3. That if  
 'we suppose that God gives Men arbitrary Com-  
 'mands to try their Obedience; this is a Thought  
 'very injurious to the Deity, not only as it repre-  
 'sents Him as acting in a tyrannical Manner, but  
 'as it supposeth Him to need such a Trial; when  
 'we ought to think, that He foreknows without  
 'Trial what Men will do on all Occasions. Tho',  
 'was such a Trial necessary, moral and immoral  
 'Things would be the most proper Subjects for  
 'it; because we cannot practise one, or refrain  
 'from the other, without subduing our Lusts and  
 'Passions. But what speculative Articles will not  
 'an ill Man profess? Or what indifferent Things  
 'will he not practise, to be indulged in any one  
 'darling Vice (*r*)? 4. That if it is supposed  
 'that sensible Things make a deeper Impression  
 'on the Minds of the Common People than  
 'Words, and that for this Reason symbolical  
 'Representations may be ordained of God; it  
 'may easily be replied, That if we must have  
 'recourse to Words, to explain the Signification  
 'of such Symbols, they are then arbitrary Marks,  
 'whose Meaning cannot be known but from  
 'Words, and not being capable of expressing  
 'Things more fully than Words, are wholly need-  
 'less as to that purpose. But as to sensible  
 'Things making a deeper Impression on Com-  
 'mon People, That, it is presum'd, is a just Rea-  
 'son against their Use in Religion; because the  
 'Vulgar, who generally look no further than Ex-  
 'ternals, do not use them barely, as they do  
 'Words, to express their Meaning, but conceive

(*q*) P. 30, 31. (*r*) P. 176, 177.

' in them I know not what internal Holiness;  
 ' and think such Representations as necessary as  
 ' the Things represented by them; nay, by de-  
 ' grees, forgetting the Reason of their Institu-  
 ' tion, came to idolize them, as the *Israelites*  
 ' did the brazen Serpent. And this People have  
 ' always done in all Religions whatever, where  
 ' these 'symbolical Representations have been  
 ' used (s). 5. That 'tis certain the Mind may be  
 ' over-loaded as well as the Body; and the  
 ' more it is taken up with the Observation of  
 ' Things, which are not of a moral Nature, the  
 ' less it will be able to attend to those that  
 ' are; which requiring the Application of the  
 ' whole Man, can never be rightly perform'd,  
 ' while the Mind, by laying Stress on other  
 ' Things, is diverted from attending on them;  
 ' especially if it be consider'd, that Supersti-  
 ' tion, if once suffer'd to mix with Religion,  
 ' will always be gaining Ground: If Reason is  
 ' to be heard, no unnecessary Things will be ad-  
 ' mitted; but if it be not, where shall we stop?  
 ' If People are once brought to believe such  
 ' Things are good for any Thing, they will be  
 ' apt to believe they are good for all Things;  
 ' at least Pretences will never be wanting for a  
 ' Thousand Things of this Nature; and there is  
 ' nothing of this kind that Men will not come  
 ' into, if they are made to believe they carry any  
 ' Merit with them: These they will be punctual  
 ' in observing, in hopes to atone for the in-  
 ' dulging themselves in their darling Vices;  
 ' which they, not knowing how to leave, and  
 ' yet willing to secure their future Happiness,  
 ' hope by the Help of such Expedients to com-  
 ' pound with Heaven; and then vainly ima-



' gine they cannot have too many Things of  
 ' this Nature ; or shew too great a Zeal for the  
 ' Practice of them, when assur'd by their Priests,  
 ' (who, as they fondly imagine, know the whole  
 ' Counsel of God) that they are acceptable to  
 ' the Deity, and tend to make him propitious  
 ' to the religious Observers of them (*t*). 6. That  
 ' the supposing indifferent Things equally com-  
 ' manded with Matters of Morality, tends to  
 ' make Men believe they are alike necessary :  
 ' Nay, that the former will, by Degrees, get the  
 ' better with the Superstitious ; and acquire such  
 ' a Veneration by Age, as to make them have  
 ' Recourse to them upon all Occasions, tho' ever  
 ' so unreasonable. If People can be so far im-  
 ' posed upon, as to admit such Things into their  
 ' Religion, they will easily be persuaded to put  
 ' a greater Stress on Things, tho' of some Use in  
 ' Religion, than their Nature will bear ; tho' to  
 ' the confounding Things of the greatest Moment  
 ' with those of the smallest ; and if this is reckon'd  
 ' Superstition, much more ought the other to be  
 ' thought so (*u*). 7. That the Religion of Nature  
 ' is so entirely calculated for the good of human  
 ' Society, that tho' a Man, hurried with the Vio-  
 ' lence of his Passions, breaks it himself, yet he  
 ' would have all others most strictly observe it ;  
 ' and accordingly all Legislators punish the Breach  
 ' of it : Whereas no Man rejects any positive  
 ' Institution himself, but is willing that all others  
 ' should do so too ; which plainly shews, Men do  
 ' not apprehend it to be for the general Good of  
 ' Mankind (*x*). 8. That if indifferent Things,  
 ' which have no Worth or Excellency in them-  
 ' selves, could contribute to the Worth or Excel-  
 ' lency of Religion ; the more they abounded,

(*t*) P. 141, 142.(*u*) P. 149, 150.(*x*) P. 63.

' the more excellent would Religion be; which  
 ' yet is so far from being true, even in the Opi-  
 ' nion of those who contend for such Things,  
 ' that even they, when they are to shew the Ex-  
 ' cellency of the Christian Religion, recommend  
 ' it for having but few of those Things; which  
 ' is supposing that it loses of its Excellency in  
 ' Proportion to what it has of this Nature; and  
 ' that they have an higher and more honourable  
 ' Conception of it, who believe it has no such  
 ' Mixture to spoil its Beauty and destroy its Sim-  
 ' plicity; but that, like its Author, 'tis wholly  
 ' Spiritual, and as such worthy its Divine Ori-  
 ' ginal (y). 9. That to suppose that God, by the  
 ' Law of Nature, leaves Men at Liberty in all in-  
 ' different Things, and yet by a positive Law re-  
 ' strains this Liberty in certain Parts and Ages of  
 ' the World; is to suppose God determines one  
 ' Way by immediate, and another Way by mediate  
 ' Revelation; both Laws too subsisting at the  
 ' same time: And that if any Traditional Law  
 ' abridges the Liberty allow'd by the Law of  
 ' Nature; 'tis so far contrary to the Law of Na-  
 ' ture, and invades those Rights which Na-  
 ' ture and its Author has given Mankind (z).  
 ' 10. That all those Reasons which oblige God  
 ' to command good, and forbid evil Things, must  
 ' wholly cease in relation to a Subject which by  
 ' being indifferent partakes of neither; and that  
 ' was there any Reason to deprive Men of their  
 ' Liberty in indifferent Things, they would then  
 ' cease to be indifferent; on the contrary, the  
 ' same Reasons which oblige him to interpose in  
 ' Things whose Nature is either good or evil,  
 ' forbid it in indifferent Things; since Mens

(y) P. 123, 124.      (z) P. 134.

‘ Happiness depends on their Liberty in all such  
 ‘ Things (a). 11. That if we consider the infi-  
 ‘ nite Variety of Circumstances; the different  
 ‘ Manners and Customs that prevail in different  
 ‘ Places; the Prejudices of the Weak, Ignorant,  
 ‘ and Superstitious; and the Designs of Ambi-  
 ‘ tious Men; there is nothing of a mutable Na-  
 ‘ ture, if once esteem’d immutably fixed by God,  
 ‘ but must sometimes become prejudicial to the  
 ‘ End it was intended to promote; especially in a  
 ‘ Religion design’d to extend over the whole  
 ‘ World, as well as to last to the End of it (b).  
 ‘ 12. That it is so far from being necessary for God  
 ‘ to interpose in such Cases, that it only serves for  
 ‘ an Handle to human Impositions (c). 13. That  
 ‘ if Men are made to believe there are Things,  
 ‘ which have no Relation to the Good of Society,  
 ‘ necessary to Salvation; they must suppose it  
 ‘ their Duty, to use such Means as will most  
 ‘ effectually serve this Purpose; and that God,  
 ‘ in requiring the End, requires all those Means  
 ‘ that will best secure and propagate it. That  
 ‘ ’tis to this Principle we owe the most cruel Per-  
 ‘ secutions, Inquisitions, Crusades and Massacres;  
 ‘ the innumerable Tumults, Seditions and Rebel-  
 ‘ lions against the best of Princes; as well as  
 ‘ endless Feuds and Animosities in private Fami-  
 ‘ lies, and among the nearest Relations. That  
 ‘ they who are govern’d by this Principle, cannot  
 ‘ be good Men, good Subjects, good Citizens, or  
 ‘ good Neighbours; no Ties of Friendship or  
 ‘ Gratitude, no Vows or Oaths can bind them,  
 ‘ when the Interest of such Things, as they think  
 ‘ they are obliged to promote on pain of God’s  
 ‘ Displeasure, require the contrary Conduct (d).

(a) P. 135. (b) P. 109. (c) P. 117. (d) P. 151, 152.



‘ 14. That such Men do not so much as pretend  
 ‘ to authorize these execrable Principles from the  
 ‘ Law of Nature, but endeavour to support them  
 ‘ by Traditional Religion (e). 15. That if we  
 ‘ suppose any traditionary Religion to contain any  
 ‘ arbitrary Precepts, they who lie under the Rules  
 ‘ of such a Religion, will be supposed to be in a  
 ‘ much worse Condition, in this Life and the  
 ‘ other, than those who are under no Law but  
 ‘ that of Nature. Because these latter are not  
 ‘ exposed to suffer in the present World on the  
 ‘ Account of any indifferent Matters, nor do they  
 ‘ hazard the Favour of God in the other Life by  
 ‘ any Mistakes or Omissions in such Matters.  
 ‘ They must delight in their Duty, as having  
 ‘ nothing requir’d of them, but what they most  
 ‘ evidently see tends to their Good; and conse-  
 ‘ quently are free (no small Happiness) from all  
 ‘ panick Fears; while they who believe there are  
 ‘ Things meerly positive in Religion, of which  
 ‘ Reason affords no Light how they are to be  
 ‘ perform’d, or even what they are, must lie under  
 ‘ endless Doubts and Fears (f).

X. 1. ‘ That no Traditional Religion can have  
 ‘ equal Evidence with Natural Religion. Natu-  
 ‘ ral Religion, tho’ not knowable by Intuition, is  
 ‘ to be demonstrated by such Proofs as have me-  
 ‘ diately or immediately a necessary Connection  
 ‘ with our self-evident Notions: But that God  
 ‘ reveal’d his Will any other way besides the Light  
 ‘ of Nature, can only come under the Head of  
 ‘ Probability. And if it is but probable that  
 ‘ God made any external Revelation at all; it  
 ‘ can be but probable, tho’ perhaps not in the  
 ‘ same degree of Probability, that he made this  
 ‘ or that Revelation. And as there can be no

(e) P. 103. (f) P. 122, 125, 156.

‘ Demonstration of the Revelation itself, so nei-  
 ‘ ther can there be any of its Conveyance to  
 ‘ Posterity ; much less that this or that has been  
 ‘ convey’d entire to distant Times and Places ;  
 ‘ especially if a Revelation be of any Bulk, and  
 ‘ which may have gone through the Hands of  
 ‘ Men, who not only in the dark Ages of the  
 ‘ Church, but even in the Beginning, if we judge  
 ‘ by the Number of corrupted Passages, and even  
 ‘ forg’d Books, were capable of any pious Fraud.  
 ‘ Nay, the very Nature of Probability is such,  
 ‘ that were it only left to Time itself, even that  
 ‘ would wear it out ; at least if it be true what  
 ‘ Mathematicians pretend to demonstrate, *viz.*  
 ‘ That the Probability of Facts depending on  
 ‘ Human Testimony, must gradually lessen in  
 ‘ Proportion to the Distance of Time when they  
 ‘ were done (g). 2. That Natural Religion carries  
 ‘ its own Evidence with it, these internal inse-  
 ‘ perable Marks of Truth ; [which internal Evi-  
 ‘ dence, by the Confession of the best Protestant  
 ‘ Writers, is the main Pillar of their Faith in the  
 ‘ Christian Doctrines (b),] but any Religion  
 ‘ which depends on Tradition, wants foreign Aid  
 ‘ and Assistance. We must be certain that the  
 ‘ first Propagators of it could not be imposed on  
 ‘ themselves, or would not impose upon others ;  
 ‘ or, in other Words, were infallible and impec-  
 ‘ cable. Nor is this alone sufficient. For if evil  
 ‘ Beings can impress Notions in Mens Minds as  
 ‘ strongly as good Beings, and cause Miracles to  
 ‘ be done in Confirmation of them, there is no  
 ‘ way to know to which of the two, Notions thus  
 ‘ impress’d are owing, but from their Nature and  
 ‘ Tendency, or those internal Marks of Wisdom  
 ‘ and Goodness, by which they plainly shew them-

(g) P. 184, 185. (b) P. 185.

‘ selves to be part of Natural Religion. And if  
 ‘ so, external Proofs can carry us no farther than  
 ‘ internal Proofs do (*i*).

XI. 1. ‘ That supposing a Traditional Reli-  
 ‘ gion could have the highest Evidence, and even  
 ‘ equal to that of Natural Religion; yet there  
 ‘ would be such insuperable Difficulties in the un-  
 ‘ derstanding of it, (2. from the Variety of Read-  
 ‘ ings, Allegories, Hyperboles, Metaphors, Types,  
 ‘ Parables, or Phrases of an uncertain Significa-  
 ‘ tion,) as to render it, even to the Learned, and  
 ‘ much more to the Unlearned, (for whom it  
 ‘ should seem chiefly design’d,) of little use (*k*).

‘ 3. Religion, it is argued, either does not con-  
 ‘ cern the Majority, as being incapable of form-  
 ‘ ing a Judgment about it; or it must carry such  
 ‘ internal Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean  
 ‘ Capacities are able to discover; or else, not-  
 ‘ withstanding the infinite Variety of Religions,  
 ‘ All who do not understand the Original Lan-  
 ‘ guages their Traditional Religions are written  
 ‘ in, which is all Mankind, a very few excepted,  
 ‘ are alike bound in all Places to pin their Faith  
 ‘ on their Priests, and believe in Men, who have  
 ‘ an Interest to deceive them; and who have  
 ‘ seldom fail’d to do so when Occasion serves (*l*).

‘ 4. But that admitting the Common People  
 ‘ could be certain that the Original hath been  
 ‘ convey’d and translated faithfully; yet since  
 ‘ most Texts have vastly varied, and sometimes  
 ‘ contrary Interpretations, and the literal Sense  
 ‘ very often kills, they cannot be confident they  
 ‘ do not mistake their Meaning, except the Rea-  
 ‘ son of Things makes it evident. 5. But sup-  
 ‘ posing no such Uncertainty in the Meaning of  
 ‘ Texts, yet since the Scripture contains some

(*i*) P. 243.

(*k*) P. 231.

(*l*) P. 232.



‘ Precepts which are Occasional, obliging only  
 ‘ certain Persons, upon certain Occasions, and in  
 ‘ certain Circumstances ; and others that are of  
 ‘ an Eternal Obligation, and makes no Distinction  
 ‘ in delivering them ; even the most learned Men  
 ‘ can have no other way of knowing one from  
 ‘ the other, but from the Nature of the Precepts ;  
 ‘ and that those only are of an Eternal Obliga-  
 ‘ tion, which are founded on the Eternal Rea-  
 ‘ son of Things ; and which would Eternally  
 ‘ oblige, whether deliver’d in Scripture or not (*m*).  
 ‘ 6. And had God from Time to Time spoke  
 ‘ to all Mankind in their several Languages, and  
 ‘ his Words had miraculously convey’d the same  
 ‘ Ideas to all Persons ; yet He could not speak  
 ‘ more plainly than he has done by the Things  
 ‘ themselves, and the Relation which Reason  
 ‘ shews there is between them : Nay, since ’tis  
 ‘ impossible in any Book or Books, that a parti-  
 ‘ cular Rule could be given for every Case, we  
 ‘ must even then have had Recourse to the Light  
 ‘ of Nature, to teach us our Duty in most Cases ;  
 ‘ especially considering the numberless Circum-  
 ‘ stances which attend us, and which perpetually  
 ‘ varying, may make the same Actions, accord-  
 ‘ ingly as Men are differently affected by them,  
 ‘ either Good or Bad (*n*).

From all these Premises we are left to conclude,

XII. ‘ That since it is inconsistent with the  
 ‘ Wisdom of God to do any thing needless, and  
 ‘ it is needless to do that which has not only been  
 ‘ done, but better done before ; it cannot be sup-  
 ‘ posed that God, after having given to Man-  
 ‘ kind a perfect, plain, and universal Law by the  
 ‘ Light of Nature, should afterwards give to a

(*m*) 245, 246.      (*n*) P. 27.

‘ Part of Mankind, an imperfect, obscure, and  
 ‘ uncertain one. That therefore the LAW of  
 ‘ NATURE ALONE is to be consider’d as the  
 ‘ LAW of GOD, and that NATURAL RE-  
 ‘ LIGION is the ONLY true RELIGION.  
 ‘ That ALL pretended Traditional Religions,  
 ‘ as far as they have any Thing in common with  
 ‘ *This*, are *Alike* to be receiv’d : And where they  
 ‘ differ at all from it, by commanding or forbid-  
 ‘ ding any Thing contrary to, or besides it, (as  
 ‘ they *All* do more or less,) they are alike to be  
 ‘ rejected, without giving ourselves the Trouble  
 ‘ of examining them any farther ’.

That this is a fair Representation of our Au-  
 thor’s Argument, I will appeal to himself. In-  
 deed the Premises are all in his own Words, as  
 may be seen by the Quotations ; and as for the  
 Conclusion which he leaves the Reader to make  
 for himself, it is no other than what necessarily  
 follows from his Premises.

Having thus fairly stated his Argument in its  
 full Force, I shall attempt a clear Answer to it :  
 And that this may the better be understood, I  
 shall in my Reply make use of the same Divisions  
 and Subdivisions, into which, for Method sake,  
 I have divided his Argument.

I. ‘ From the Notion of *God* as a *Governor*,  
 ‘ and *Mankind* as the *Governed* ; it does indeed  
 ‘ clearly follow, that Mankind have always been  
 ‘ under a Divine Law ’ ; and since an unknown  
 Law, that is, a Law not sufficiently promulgated,  
 is in Effect no Law at all, it must be granted,  
 ‘ that Mankind have at all Times had the Know-  
 ‘ ledge of that Law of God which they were  
 ‘ under ’.

D

II. ‘ That

II. ' That the only Design of God in creating ' Mankind, was to make them happy ', is not, perhaps, altogether so clear a Point as the Learned Author seems to imagine (o). But because there is no necessity of denying the Consequences which he deduces from hence, (*viz.* that ' God has no ' other Intention in giving Laws to Men, and ' therefore can require nothing but what makes ' for their Happiness, and forbid them only those ' Things which tend to their Hurt ') it may, at present, be taken for granted. Only let it be observed by way of Explication of the last Proposition, that a Thing may be for the Good or Hurt of Men *mediately* as well as *immediately*: And that it is very consistent with this Principle to suppose, that God requires Things which are not *directly* serviceable to the Happiness of his Creatures, when they are *mediately* useful to that End: Or, on the contrary, to maintain that God forbids Men Things, which though not *directly* hurtful, will in the End prove so, by leading to other Things that are *in themselves* hurtful.

III. ' That the *primary* Precepts of the Law ' of Nature, are only those Duties which flow ' from the Nature and Reason of Things, and ' the Relations we stand in to God and our Fellow-creatures '; cannot be denied. But as it is acknowledged, ' that there may be other ' Things conducing as Means to those Things ' which are in their own Nature obligatory '; and ' that the observing these Things, as human ' Discretion shall direct, is a Part of the *Law of ' Nature* '; it must, I think, also be granted, that the observance of such Means upon a *Divine Appointment*, (such an *Appointment* being supposed

(o) See *Divine Rectitude*, and the Answer to it, entitled, *Divine Benevolence*.



proved,) is *much more* a Part of the *Law of Nature*. And as, in our Author's way of Reasoning, it is no Reflection on that Law to suppose it capable of receiving further Light from *Human Discretion*; so I should apprehend it would be much less a Reflection on the Law of Nature to assert, that it is capable of Improvement from the Divine Understanding. Nor, when Things are more carefully examined, will it, I believe, appear, that *Human Discretion* is, in all these Cases, a better Guide than the *Appointment of Infinite Wisdom* (p).

IV. ' That all Mankind are capable of discovering the Law of Nature by their Reasoning Powers.—That the sincere Observance of it is sufficient to make Men acceptable to God;—and that every equal Degree of Sincerity will entitle Men to an equal Degree of Divine Favour'; are Propositions that are true, when rightly explain'd. But they must be more distinctly consider'd.

I. The Law of Nature is, in the general, that Method of acting in all Circumstances which the Nature and Reason of Things points out; or, in other Words, the doing in all Circumstances what is right and fit. The Use of those Faculties by which Men are distinguished from Brutes, is

(p) When I speak of the *Law of Nature* as capable of being improv'd by *Human Discretion*, I do not mean the *Law of Nature*, abstractly consider'd; but that Degree of Knowledge of the Light of Nature which any particular Man may be supposed to have attained. The Law of Nature, consider'd in itself, that is, as it would appear to an Infinite Understanding, is perfect and capable of no Improvement. But the most large and comprehensive Knowledge which any single Man has of it, may be increased by the Labours of another Man: And much more may it be improved by Revelation from that Infinite Mind, to whom alone the whole compass of the Law of Nature, that is, the fitness of all Things, is fully known.

undoubtedly the Means by which Mankind are to discover what is right and fit, that is, what is the Law of Nature in any particular Case. The first and general Principle of the Law of Nature, that Men should, in all Circumstances, do what is best, is self-evident and universally acknowledged. As to the Particulars of the Law of Nature, there are some Things, whose fitness or unfitness is so immediately perceivable, that All Mankind have universally acknowledged it : there are some Things which have been always accounted praise-worthy, and others which have universally been condemn'd as vicious. And consequently, not only the general Principle of the Law of Nature, but the most important Branches of it, must be granted to have been not only discoverable, but actually discover'd by all Mankind by the Use of their Reasoning Powers. But there are other Things which (though to a careful, unprejudiced, and considerate Mind, they may be sufficiently proved to be parts of the Law of Nature) yet, partly because the fitness is not so immediately discernible, and partly because through Prejudice or Partiality the Mind is not so well disposed to discern them ; it must be acknowledged, not only particular Persons, but whole Nations, in particular Ages, have not assented to. And though whatever has really been discover'd to be a Part of the Law of Nature, by the Reason of any one Man, may, in a Sense, be said to be discoverable by every Man, (the Faculty of Reasoning, abstractly consider'd, being supposed to be alike in all Men,) yet, to speak more properly, that only should be said to be discoverable by the Reason of all Mankind, which All Men, considering the Circumstances in which they are placed, might reasonably be presumed to discover. All the Propositions in *Euclid*, being there actually demonstrated, may for that Reason

Reason be said, in a Sense, to be demonstrable by all Mankind. But no one would therefore pretend to say, that it was reasonable to expect that every Man should be a compleat Mathematician. And it would be still more absurd to suppose, that because every Part of the Law of Nature is demonstrable, All Mankind by the use of their Reasoning Powers, must necessarily discover the very nicest Branches of it. For to the discovery of Mathematical Truth there is need only of Application and Diligence ; but the Knowledge of Morality requires these Qualifications equally with the other ; and this besides, which is by much the most difficult, *viz. Integrity.*

2. *Sincerity* will, I think, in all Cases be sufficient to make Men acceptable to God. By which I do not mean (as the Asserters of this Doctrine have sometimes been grossly misunderstood) that whatever Sins a Man commits, he shall be in a State of Favour with God, provided at the Time he commits them he is persuaded they are no Sins, and does them without Remorse of Conscience : But what I mean is, that whosoever can justly plead at the Bar of the Omniscient Judge, that he hath faithfully discharged his Duty, as far as all Circumstances consider'd, he could reasonably be supposed to have discover'd it ; such a one, I say, shall not fail of Acceptance and a Reward. By virtue of this Principle it may charitably be presum'd, that many amongst the Heathens will be accepted at last, even though they had lived in the breach of, what we justly suppose, Parts of the Law of Nature. Otherwise we must consign them all over in the Gross to Perdition, since it is certain some kind of Idolatry (to omit other Things) were universally practiced by them without Scruple. But to suppose that because he who has the least Knowledge



ledge of his Duty, acting according to that with Sincerity, shall be accepted ; therefore it matters not how little any one knows of it, is a very irrational Conclusion. The fallacy of this Argument, ‘ That the sincere Observance of the Law of Nature is sufficient to make Men acceptable to God : Therefore the Observance of a Supernatural Law is needless ’ : I say, the fallacy of this Argument will appear by shewing how easily it may be retorted. Thus, ‘ The Observance of less than the whole Law of Nature, will in some Circumstances be sufficient to render Men acceptable to God ; therefore all other Parts of the Law of Nature are needless ’. By what way soever a Deist would answer this Argument when urged in favour of Atheism ; a Christian may answer it, when used in favour of Infidelity. Nor indeed is the Answer in either Case very difficult. For though *Sincerity* is all that is sufficient to make Men acceptable with God, and more than that is *in this respect* needless ; yet every one will perceive, that if all the Laws of God, whether Natural or Supernatural, have mediately or immediately a Tendency to promote the Good of the Observer, and contain a Reward in the very Observance of them ; This, I say, being supposed, (as it always should be,) every one will perceive, that the more extensive Knowledge he hath of his Duty, the greater Advantages he has for Happiness. Let me only suggest this further, that as the Observance of a Part of the Law of Nature will be sufficient to render none acceptable to God, but only those whom He knew, all Circumstances consider’d, could not reasonably have been expected to know more of it ; so the Observance of the whole Law of Nature, (as far as that can be supposed,) will be sufficient to render those only acceptable to God, from whom He knew,

knew, by the same equitable Consideration, He could not reasonably expect that they should have known any other Law but that of Nature. A Thought which the rejecters of Revelation in Christian and Protestant Countries would do well to consider.

3. If *Sincerity* is that which renders Men acceptable to God, it unavoidably follows, 'that every equal Degree of Sincerity will entitle Men to an equal Degree of Divine Favour'. But it is a great Mistake to conclude from hence, 'that Men of all Religions, if equally diligent in their Search of the true Religion, shall have all the same Share of Happiness in the Life to come'. For in this State of the Case, the Notion of *Sincerity* is very much confined, and includes much less than was comprehended under the first Account of it. *Sincerity*, in the full Notion of it, implies an honest Endeavour, not only to know, but to perform every Part of our Duty. And the Value of it arises from the Difficulties attending both, which discover the Strength of the honest Principle that surmounted them. But in the Case last mentioned, *Sincerity* is consider'd only as it regards the Discovery of Truth, which is really but one Part of our Duty. Let us suppose two Persons, at the same Time, with Minds equally inclin'd to receive the Truth, applying themselves to find out their Duty: But one of them, by the Help of better Natural Parts, or from some external Advantages, discovers an Obligation to more Duties than the other. And the more Duties he discovers, the greater Exercise he will find of his Obedience. His Work will be the harder. Now though upon the Account of Diligence in the Search of his Duty he has no Preeminence above the other, who was supposed equally sincere in the Search of it; yet he has  
certainly

certainly the Advantage of him in this respect, that he takes *more* Pains to *practice* his Duty, as well as *equal* Pains to *know* it. And upon this Account it is reasonable to suppose he shall be entitled to a greater Reward. And therefore, to prevent, as far as possible, all Misunderstanding upon this Argument, instead of saying [that every equal Degree of Sincerity entitles Men to an equal Degree of Divine Favour,] I should rather express it thus, [that every equal Degree of *Virtue* (meaning by Virtue, not the external Acts, but the internal Virtuous Disposition,) will entitle Men to an equal Degree of Divine Favour (q)]. In short, to state this Matter as clearly as I can: Almighty God, the Great Judge of the World, in distributing the future Reward, will not consider so much the Degrees of Knowledge or Virtue of which any Man is possessed consider'd abstractly, as consider'd in proportion to the Advantages he hath enjoyed for one or the other. He that with less Advantages for Knowledge or Virtue, has attained equal Degrees of each with one who had enjoyed greater Advantages, shall receive a larger Reward: And so *vice versa*. Only it must be observed, that as Knowledge and Virtue are Things in themselves valuable, the *natural* Advantages arising from them will always be propor-

(q) The Reason of my substituting the Terms *Virtue*, or *internal Virtuous Disposition*, instead of *Sincerity*, is, that the Term *Sincerity* is so ambiguous. It is sometimes used for Sincerity through the whole Character of a Person, which is the same as Virtue; sometimes for Integrity in a particular Instance, as it regards the Search after Truth; and sometimes for the acting according to a present Persuasion. When it is spoken of as the certain Method of procuring the Divine Favour, I think it must be taken in the first Sense. But it being in our *English* Language so commonly used in the two latter Senses, has occasion'd incautious Readers to take it in one or other of the latter Senses (especially the last) in this Argument.



tionable to the Degrees in which they are possessed.

V. How far the Law of Nature is level to the Capacities of all Reasonable Creatures, and naturally and necessarily assented to by them, has been already consider'd. And whether the Disadvantages arising from a Law committed to Writing are so great as this Author would insinuate, we shall have occasion to consider under another Head.

VI. ' That the Law of Nature is the Law of God, and that God is perfect and immutable ', will easily be admitted. But it by no means follows, that because God is *perfect* and *immutable*, therefore All his Laws must, in the same strict Sense, be *perfect* and *immutable* as He Himself is. God is, in the highest Sense, *absolutely perfect* and *immutable*; or, to express myself in the beautiful Language of the Apostle (r), *The Father of Lights, with whom is no Variableness, neither shadow of turning.* A Law may be said to be *perfect* either *properly* and *strictly*, when it is in itself the best that could possibly be; or else in a lower Sense, when it is the best that could be proposed, considering the Circumstances of those to whom it is given. The best and most perfect Law, consider'd in itself, is certainly the Law of Nature, viz. the Acting in all Circumstances as right Reason requires. This is that Rule by which Infinite Wisdom is directed, and that by which the Almighty constantly and invariably acts. But it may justly be question'd whether this can be affirm'd of any Being besides. And it is very reasonable to suppose, that in the View of the Divine Intellect, all created Wisdom is still chargeable with Folly. But be that as it

(r) Jam. i. 17.

will, this is certain, with respect to Creatures of such a Make as ours, the exact and rigorous insisting on a *perfect* Conformity to the *Law of Nature*, would involve the whole Race of Mankind in Guilt and Misery. Though the Law of Nature is in every Part of it reasonable and fit, yet such is the Force of Human Appetites and Passions, (be the Cause what it will,) that, in Fact, it is evident that no Man ever did, or, *morally speaking*, could be supposed to be constantly govern'd by it. Even *Natural Religion* therefore is not understood rigidly to insist on the *whole Law of Nature*, (no not as far as it is known,) but is always represented as leaving place for Repentance. Nor do the Adversaries of Revelation, in my Judgment, ever oppose it with more Strength, than when they represent Revelation as challenging this Doctrine to itself alone, and denying that God can be known to be propitious to Penitents by the Light of Nature. An *absolute perfect Law* to *imperfect Creatures*, would be impracticable, and consequently lose its Obligation. For this Reason I freely own it is my Opinion, that Men might conclude, without an express Revelation, 'that Repentance 'and Sincerity would be accepted by God instead 'of Innocence and Perfection'. Nor do I see any thing in Revelation inconsistent with this Sentiment, but the contrary. And by allowing this Principle, we may easily avoid all the ill Consequences which this Writer would infer from the *Perfection* of the *Law of Nature*. For, as notwithstanding the boasted *Perfection* of that *Law*, it is allow'd that *Natural Religion* dispenses with it, by accepting Sincerity for Innocence, (because the present Circumstance of Human Nature requires it,) so may it, I think, as readily be admitted, without the least detracting from the *Perfection*

*section of the Law of Nature*, that the Circumstances of Things so directing, some Things, not *in themselves* the best, may be allowed or required.—This leads us to consider the *Immutability of the Law of Nature*. A Law may be said to be *immutable*, either *strictly*, when it is *absolutely invariable*, or *less properly*, when it is *not to be changed as long as the Reasons on which it was founded remain the same*. The general Principle of the *Law of Nature*, (as has been before observed,) is the doing in all Circumstances what is right and fit. This is *absolutely immutable*. Farther, there are some Things which *in all possible Circumstances* will appear reasonable; and there are other Things which, *in no possible Supposition*, can be rendered fit. That Favours should be acknowledged, and, where it can be, returned, is, *in every conceivable Circumstance*, reasonable: That an innocent Person should be the Object of Hatred, is, *on every possible Supposition*, unfit. But there are many Things which, *under certain Circumstances*, are unfit; which yet, *under a Change of Circumstances*, may be very reasonable. *Incest*, in the *present State of Things*, is vicious; but, *in the beginning of the World*, (supposing the whole Human Race to have descended from one single Pair) it was quite the contrary. The same may be said to the Cases of *Polygamy* and *Divorce*. The Circumstances of the World in general might render these Things unfit, which yet at some Times, and under some Circumstances, may not be so. And though, *in the general*, it is fit, that Things of a *Moral Nature* should be the only Subject of the Divine Command; yet, *at other Times*, Things of a *positive Nature* may be very proper, and greatly subservient to the Practice of Morality itself. In a Word, *The Law of Nature*, as it enjoins the general Practice of that which,



under all Circumstances, is best ; will ever be *unchangeably* the same. As it requires some Things which in all Circumstances are right, and forbids others, which, in every supposable Circumstance, must ever be wrong ; it is also *immutable*. But with respect to other Things, which, as Circumstances vary, may be either good or bad ; it can only be said to be *unchangeable*, as, *during the Continuance of the same Circumstances, it is immutable*. And as it is easy to suppose that Men may, by the Exercise of their own Reason, see when the Alteration of Circumstances requires a different Conduct, and act accordingly ; so it is much more reasonable to suppose, that they may vary their Conduct, when, by an express Revelation, God himself declares that Alteration.

VII. 1. Though we should grant the *Perfection* and *Immutability* of the *Law of Nature* in that Sense in which the ingenious Author seems to contend for it ; and, which is a necessary Consequence of such a Concession, though we should farther admit, ‘ that Revelation can require nothing which ‘ Natural Religion does not antecedently require ; ‘ and can forbid nothing but what that has forbidden ’ ; yet it would not follow, even from these Concessions, ‘ that Natural and Revealed ‘ Religion were different in nothing but in the ‘ Manner of Communication ’. For though Revelation introduced no new *Precepts*, it may easily be supposed to add new *Sanctions* and *Motives* to the *Religion of Nature* ; and on both these Accounts be distinct from it.—The *Sanctions* of *Natural Religion*, (besides the Natural Consequences of Virtue and Vice,) are those farther additional Rewards or Punishments, which by the Use of our own Reason alone, we may conclude will be bestowed by the Great Governour of the World on the Virtuous and Vicious in a Future State.  
And

And because it has been disputed how far Reason will carry us on this Head, without the Help of Revelation, I will crave leave to propose my Sentiments of that Matter in a few Words.—I think we may conclude from the *Justice* of God, consider'd as the Governor of the World, that there must be a *Future State*, (for such, at least, as have not in the present enjoyed the proper Reward of Virtue,) in which there shall be a greater Distinction between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*, than there is in the *present*. Thus far seems *Demonstration* (s). I think likewise it is *highly probable*, that in this *future State*, the *Virtuous* will persevere in their *Virtue*; and that it is *probable* (though in a much lower Degree) that the *Wicked* will persist in their *Wickedness*; and consequently, that the Happiness of the one, and the Misery of the other, shall last as long as their Existence. Notwithstanding, as it must be acknowledged pos-

(s) When I use the Terms *Demonstration*, *assured*, &c. I desire it may be observed, that I make use of them not in the rigid Sense that they are used in by Mathematicians, (in which Sense all Revelation, and, perhaps, the Moral Perfections of the Deity, are not capable of Demonstration,) but in a Moral Sense, for such an Assurance as excludes Doubt. And though Arguments drawn from the *Wisdom* and *Goodness* of the *Divine Nature* would be equally allowable with others taken from *Justice* and *Veracity*; if we could as certainly say what *Goodness* and *Wisdom* requires, as we can safely pronounce what is requir'd from Equity and Truth; yet, as this is not the Case, I apprehend, all Arguments taken from the former of these Perfections, will in the present State of Human Understanding, affect our Minds with much less Force, than those which are deduced from the latter. For the *Goodness* of God is regulated by his *Wisdom*: and what to our partial View appears *wise*, might on a perfect View of Things be found *folly*. But what is contrary to *Justice* or *Veracity*, (of which we are much better Judges,) can in no Circumstances become *right*; and therefore all Arguments by which any Method of acting in the Deity could be proved contrary to *these*, must be the strongest Proofs that the *Divine Being* will not act after that manner.

fible to suppose, that *in that State* the *Virtuous* may apostatize, and as it will be less difficult to imagine that the *Vicious* may reform ; it is by *Revelation* alone we are assured, that the present Life is the only *State of Probation*. Again, I imagine it would be *probable* from the *Goodness* of God, that *Virtuous Beings*, continuing such, should continue always in Existence, to enjoy the *natural* happy Effects of their *Virtue* ; and from the *Wisdom* of God we might, perhaps, form a probable Argument to conclude, that *vicious Beings*, continuing such, should have their Existence perpetuated, that they might always suffer the *natural* miserable Effects of their *Vice*. But as there is evidently no *Injustice* in God's annihilating an *unhappy Sinner* ; so, strictly speaking, there can be no *Injustice* in his annihilating an *happy virtuous Person* ; provided (which in the present Case is supposed) that he hath first enjoyed a sufficient Reward for his *Virtue*. For this is all that even an innocent Creature can pretend to *deserve* of his Creator : and therefore, I think, this is all that *Reason* can certainly discover (t). *Revelation* alone assures us, that the Duration of the Future Retribution to the *Righteous*, but especially to the *Wicked*, will be strictly *Eternal*. According to this Account, (which, upon the most serious Deliberation, seems to me to be the true State of this Matter,) *Revelation* is supposed to add to the *Sanctions* of the Law of Nature, and Natural Religion, by representing the present Life as the only *State of Trial*, and extending the Duration of the Rewards and Punishments in the Life

(t) As to the Case of Infants and Idiots, who are not to be consider'd as Moral Agents; Reason can discover nothing *certainly*, as to the manner in which they shall be disposed of after Death.



to come. It may not be amiss to suggest this farther, that Revelation has discover'd *additional Rewards* to be conferred on the *Righteous*, and *additional Punishments* to be inflicted on the *Wicked*, in the future State, besides the *natural Rewards* of Virtue and Vice, which, *perhaps*, are the only ones that Reason would *with Certainty* make out even in the future Life.—But besides *additional Sanctions* in the way of Rewards and Punishments, it is also easy to conceive, that Natural Religion may be reinforced, and the Obligation to it strengthened, by giving us the Knowledge of such Truths (otherwise not to be known) as shall furnish out new *Motives* to Virtue. Of this Nature is the Account which the Scripture gives us of the first Entrance of *Death* into the World, and the Restoration of *Immortality*.—The Entrance of *Mortality* upon the first *Violation* of *Innocence*, and the Re-entrance of *Life* upon the first Instance of *Perfect Obedience*, are strong and expressive Indications of the *Desert* of *Sin*, and the *Worth* of *Holiness* in the Estimation of *Infinite Wisdom*.—The exhibiting to Mankind a *complete Example* of Universal Obedience in their own Nature, hath a very powerful Tendency to excite them to a continual Progress in Virtue. The Method in which Christianity teacheth us to expect the *Forgiveness* of our *Sins*, is such as will render the Belief of that Doctrine more steady, and may serve to remove entirely all those *ill-grounded Suspicions* which guilty Minds are apt to entertain: when *in Condescension* to our *Infirmities*, God is represented as setting forth his own Son as a *Propitiation* for our *Sins*, and Christ is represented, by virtue of that Atonement, as interceding for us at his Father's Right Hand, as a Mediator between God and Man. This also serves as a great Motive to Holiness, by putting our Obedience on the foot of  
Gratitude

Gratitude for the highest Favours. For (agreeably to what has been before shewn to be most consonant to right Reason) *Eternal Life* (the Promise of which is indeed the great Advantage of Revelation) is never in Scripture represented as a Reward of *Debt* to *imperfect* Virtue; but it is described as *the Gift of God by Jesus Christ* (u), who having by his Death abolished Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light (x), was exalted by God to his Right Hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, a Prince of Life (y), with Power over all Flesh, that he should give *Eternal Life* to as many as his Father had given him (z), i. e. to all his sincere and faithful Subjects. Thus, I hope, it has been made appear, that even supposing the *Perfection* and *Immutability* of the *Law of Nature*, in the Sense that this Gentleman contends for, his Consequence [that Revelation could differ from Natural Religion only in the manner of Communication] would not be just: Since Revelation, without introducing any new *Precepts*, might superadd new *Sanctions* and *Motives* to *Natural Religion*, as the Revelations which *Christians* receive, certainly do. But to this I am aware the acute Author will object, 'That from the Perfection of the *Law of Nature* it follows, that the *Sanctions* and *Motives*, as well as the Preceptive Part of it, must be equally perfect, and incapable of receiving any Alteration or Addition from *Reveal'd Religion*'. To which I answer, That as the *Preceptive Part* of the *Law of Nature* is, in itself, the most perfect, so the *Sanctions* of that Law are, in the same Sense, perfect too: And to be induced to Virtue by these *Motives*, i. e. on account of the internal

(u) Rom. vi. 23. (x) 2 Tim. i. 10. Heb. ii. 14.  
(y) Acts v. 31. Acts iii. 15. (z) John xvii. 2.

Excellency of Virtue itself, is, I own, acting upon the noblest Principle in the World. But as an *absolutely perfect Rule* would be impracticable to *imperfect* Creatures; so the noblest Motives would lose much of their Force with Creatures of an inferior Nature. If Mankind was constituted of Reason only, and divested entirely of Appetite and Passion, it might be expected that Reason alone should govern them. But as the Case is quite otherwise, and Reason makes but a Part of our Constitution, and is often counteracted by the more ignoble Part of our Nature, some other Motives seem fit to be added as a Balance against the Force of Appetite and Passion; especially where, by any unhappy Circumstances, the true Relish of Virtue is lost, and by a false Taste, Vice is become agreeable. In this View, the *additional Sanctions and Motives of Reveal'd Religion* will, I believe, appear not unnecessary, and by the Strength of these, Men of corrupt Minds may be wrought on very profitably, in the Beginning, till the more noble Principles gain or recover their proper Force. And upon this Occasion I cannot avoid observing, that whosoever would have a true Notion of *Reveal'd Religion*, must, I think, consider it from first to last, as a Series of gracious Condescensions in Almighty God to the Corruption and Imperfection of his Creatures. If our Understandings were less liable to be deceived, and our Wills less subject to our Passions, there would be less occasion for Revelation. But as long as we are *Men*, it will not become us to reject that Assistance which *Angels*, it may be, would find needless. If our Author had view'd Revelation in this Light, I am persuaded he would have perceived that a great Part of his Reasonings might have been spared.—Hitherto we have been shewing the Usefulness of *Reveal'd Religion*,

F

upon



upon the Supposition that it brought no new *Precepts* with it. But as every one who reads the Bible must observe, that it certainly contains other *Precepts* besides those of the *Law of Nature*, and that not in the *Old Testament* only, but in the *New*; it is time to undertake the Defence of it in this View, and to examine those Reasons by which this Learned Writer would evince the Uselessness, Unfitness, or Disadvantages of such kind of *Precepts* being superadded to the *Religion of Nature*.

2. *External Revelation* is to be consider'd as erecting a larger Edifice on the Foundation of *Natural Religion*. What is thus superstructed must also be supposed to be *mediately* or *immediately* for the Good of Mankind. But to say that upon this Supposition, the Superstructure belongs to *Natural Religion*, which requires every Thing of that Kind, is, I think, no better than *trifling*. For though the *Law of Nature*, in general, requires the Practice of every Thing which is for the Good of Mankind; yet it doth not minutely descend to every particular Thing which has such a Tendency. In this way the Rules of Agriculture, Navigation, and all Mechanicks, might be brought under the *Law of Nature*; because they have all of them a Tendency to promote the Good of Men. Whatsoever *Revelation* has added, either by way of *Motive* or *Precept*, to *Natural Religion*, has or will be shewn to be greatly subservient to human Happiness. But it is one Thing to see the Advantage of a Discovery, (when it is once made,) and quite another Thing to have first discover'd it. It is one Thing to see the Reasons of a Proposition, and quite a different one to be *led* antecedently by the first Principles to the Discovery of the Proposition. Now as one Man by the Advantage of a superior natural  
Genius

Genius join'd to a constant Application, may find out such Things as, when made known, evidently appear beneficial to his Fellow-creatures, and are accordingly gratefully received by them, not without a just Acknowledgment of the Author's Merit; so the true Question is, (and we may wonder it should ever be made a Question,) whether God, whose Understanding is Infinite, may not be supposed to make known to Mankind such Things as, when reveal'd, appear equally reasonable and advantagious, though, antecedent to that Revelation, it might be impossible for the united Reason of Mankind to have discover'd them? That is, really, in other Words, whether Almighty God doth not know what is for the Good of his Creatures better than all of them put together; and whether, if he pleaseth, he may not teach them more than they knew before? Upon the Resolution of this Question the whole Controversy turns. If God is supposed to make such a *Revelation*, *Natural Religion* indeed plainly points out to us that it ought to be received: but it doth not therefore make it no *Revelation*. But if what is *given* for a *Revelation* doth not answer the Characters above-mention'd, *Natural Religion* will teach us that it is no *Divine Revelation*.—The great *End* of all *Religion*, *Natural* or *Reveal'd*, is to promote the Happiness of Mankind, by bringing them to the Practice of *Virtue*. The *Means* to attain this *End*, are indeed for the most part *various* and *mutable*. Thus the particular Portion of his Substance which each Man should spend in Acts of Charity, the Portion of Time which every one should allow to Exercises of Piety; or, on the other hand, the Extent of our lawful Liberty in the Use of Meats, or Drink, Apparel or Diversions; these Things, I say, depending on the different Constitutions and Cir-

cumstances of particular Persons, can never be ascertain'd by express Laws, but must be left to every Man's Conscience, and are to be regulated by each Man's Ability and Experience. Nor has *Revelation* ever pretended to meddle with Things of this Kind. Concerning such Things, it delivers only general Precepts; *Do all to the Glory of God* (a); *Use not Liberty for an occasion to the Flesh*; *Give no Offence* (b); *Let all Things be done to Edification*, (c), &c. which are to be applied by particular Persons to their own Circumstances. And if these are the Things which the ingenious Author so earnestly contends should be left to Human Discretion, we may safely allow it.

4. With respect to Things of this Nature it may also be granted him, ' That to imagine the contrary, is to make Things dependent on Circumstances, independent; Things that are proper only under some Circumstances, necessary under all Circumstances; nay, to make Ends mutable and Means immutable; and that these are to continue the same, though by change of Circumstances they become prejudicial, nay destructive to the End for which alone they were ordained. '—

5. In this Sense too, we may admit, ' That the more necessary any End is, there is the more Reason for People to be left at Liberty to consider in the vast Variety of Circumstances, and those too perpetually changing, what Means may be most proper for obtaining that End; since these having no Worth in themselves, can only be valued according as they more or less conduce to the Purposes they were intended for; and where God does not interpose, it is incum-

(a) 1 Cor. x. 31, 32. (b) Gal. v. 13. (c) 1 Cor. xiv. 26



‘ bent on Human Discretion, chiefly ordain’d for  
 ‘ this End, to make such Alterations as the Rea-  
 ‘ son of Things requires. ’ But though, in such  
 Things as were above-mention’d, (in which the  
 Circumstances of every Man, perhaps, differ from  
 every Man’s) it would be absurd to imagine that  
*Revelation* should interpose; yet may we not  
 easily conceive other Things serviceable to Vir-  
 tue, and agreeable to the general Circumstances  
 of Mankind, (though with some few Exceptions,) and  
 is there any Absurdity in supposing such  
 Things to be *generally* enjoyn’d by *Revelation*,  
 with an *Exception* only in such Cases as from par-  
 ticular Circumstances the Practice of them would  
 be prejudicial, or interfere with the more impor-  
 tant Duties of *Morality*? And this will here-  
 after appear to be the Case of all the *positive*  
*Duties of Reveal’d Religion*.—

6. ‘ That those Means which at one Time  
 ‘ promote Human Happiness, equally promote it  
 ‘ at all Times, ’ (if understood *universally*) is a  
 Proposition neither true in itself, nor at all con-  
 sistent with our Author’s Reasonings that have  
 been already consider’d, and that are founded on  
 a Supposition, that the Means of Human Happi-  
 ness are *various* and *mutable*. What this Gentle-  
 man means by asserting, ‘ That God at all Times  
 ‘ intended Mankind that Happiness their Nature  
 ‘ is capable of, ’ I cannot say. Unless it be, that  
 God at all Times design’d for every Man all those  
 Advantages for Happiness which any particular  
 Man ever did or could enjoy. But this is an As-  
 sertion so notoriously contradicted by universal  
 Experience, (nothing being more evident than  
 that the Circumstances of particular Persons are  
 in this respect almost infinitely varied,) that I  
 shall rather choose to suppose myself ignorant of  
 this Learned Writer’s real Meaning, than affix a  
 Sense

Sense to his Words so big with Absurdity ; though I must own, that Sense which I have mention'd, seems to me the only one of which his Words are capable, and in which the Proposition is at all pertinent to his Argument.— The Reason for which we suppose it pleas'd God to reveal his Will to Mankind not *all at once* but rather by *degrees*, is not ' that he grudged any of his Creatures the Happiness of a full Discovery ' ; but it seem'd most agreeable to his Infinite Wisdom, that when the World was overwhelm'd with the Darkness of Ignorance and Superstition, Light should be let in upon it by *degrees*, as Men were able to bear it ; and that a *less perfect* Dispensation should prepare for a *more perfect one*. This is the true Method of introducing any Reformation ; and in this, as well as other Instances, the *Foolishness of God will be found wiser than Men*. But as the same Reasons which must be used to vindicate the Perfections of God in not revealing Himself *at once*, will equally serve to shew that it was not necessary He should make a Revelation to *All* ; these will more naturally come to be consider'd under the next Head.

VIII. If we supposed that the sincere Observation of *Natural Religion*, as far as it could be discover'd, would not be sufficient to make Men acceptable to God, and that it was impossible to discharge any part of Duty in an acceptable manner without a *Revelation* ; if this, I say, was the Case, I do not see how it could be consistent with our Natural Notion of God as the Common Parent of the Universe, to imagine that he should make such a Revelation *to some*, and withhold it *from others*. But as this is carrying the Necessity of *Revelation* higher than is fit, and farther than the Scriptures have carried it, (which always suppose *that God is no Respector of Persons ; and that*

*in every Nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with Him (d),*) I shall not consider myself as obliged to defend it on that Hypothesis. And if it is allowed that God is not *in strict Justice* obliged to give a *Revelation* to any, if the bestowing it be consider'd not as a *Debt* but a *Favour*, it will be sufficient in this, as well as numberless Instances of a like Nature, to resolve all into the Determination of *Infinite Wisdom*. There is not a whit more Difficulty in conceiving that God, though he is the Common Father of his Creatures, should give a Revelation to *some* and not to *others*; or that He should reveal Himself more fully to *some*, and to *others* less; than to suppose that He should have created some more healthy, and others less; that He should make some poor, and others rich; that some should naturally be more, and others less knowing; and consequently, (which comes nearer to the present Case,) that some should understand much more of the Law of Nature than others (considering the Circumstances in which they were placed) could possibly be supposed to know. The Goodness of the Deity will incline Him to communicate some Degree of Happiness to all his Children, and prevent him from making any of them miserable without their own Fault. But it is not at all inconsistent with the Divine Goodness, to imagine that He should give Being to a Variety of Creatures, some more and others less perfect in Knowledge, and that according to the different Degree of their Understandings, they should be more or less perfect in their Wills. What Measure of Natural Capacity for Happiness, or what Number of Additional Advantages every particular Creature shall enjoy, is a Consi-

(d) Acts x. 34, 35.



deration of Wisdom only. This is the way in which a Deist would answer the Difficulties arising from the Inequalities observable in Natural and Moral Providence ; and in the very same manner may a *Christian* account for the unequal Distribution of the Gospel-Privileges. *Shall the Thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? Has not the Potter Power over the Clay, of the same Lump, to make one Vessel unto Honour and another unto Dishonour (e) ?* Let me add, that when we resolve these Things into the good Pleasure of God, (who is the undoubted Master of his own Favours,) we do not suppose that the Divine Being, even in these Cases, acts in an *arbitrary manner* ; but it is presum'd that He has particular Reasons for this different Conduct in his own Infinite Mind, though our low Understandings cannot attain them, and we have not the least Right to require an Account of his Transactions in such Matters. But though I have supposed what I think is necessary to be supposed for the supporting of *Natural and Reveal'd Religion*, yet *Natural Religion* is sufficient of itself to render those acceptable to God, *who could not reasonably be expected to know any other* ; yet it by no means follows, that it is sufficient for those, who, if they had pleased, might have known more of the Divine Will by Revelation. What Alteration that has made in this Matter, must be our next Enquiry.

IX. Amongst the vast Number of *Distinctions* which have been introduced into Divinity, there is none more just or useful than the common Distinction between the *Religion of the End*, and the *Religion of the Means*. The Religion of the End consists in the Practice of everlasting Righte-

(e) Rom. ix. 20, 21.

ousness. This, indeed, *more properly* deserves the Name of *Religion*, and is the only *Religion* which is valuable *for itself*. The *Religion* of the *Means* is so far valuable, as it has a Tendency to serve that of the *End*; and where it fails of doing this, it is utterly vain and unprofitable; as where it is consider'd as a Compensation for the Neglect of more important Duties, it is hurtful. This Superiority of the *Religion* of the *End*, and the *Subordination* of *instrumental Duties*, is no where more strongly inculcated than in the Scriptures, which we account sacred. There it is perpetually asserted, That pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the World (f). That the End of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure Heart, and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned (g). That the Kingdom of God is not Meat and Drink, but Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost: For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God and approved of Men (h). That in Christ Jesus neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith which worketh by Love (i). That the Grace of God which hath appeared, bringing Salvation unto All Men, teacheth us to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present World, looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People zealous of Good Works (k). That to love God with all the Heart, and all the Understanding, and with all the Soul,

(f) Jam. i. 27. (g) 1 Tim. i. 5. (h) Rom. xiv. 17, 18.  
 (i) Gal. v. 6. (k) Tit. ii. 11—14.

and with all the Strength, and to love his Neighbour as himself, is more than all whole Burnt Offering and Sacrifices (l). Nor is this only the Language of the New Testament. The Writers of the Old express themselves in much the same manner. He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (m)? I desired Mercy, and not Sacrifice; and the Knowledge of God, more than burnt Offerings (n). Trust ye not in lying Words, saying, The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways, and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute Judgment between a Man and his Neighbour; if ye oppress not the Stranger, the Fatherless and the Widow, and shed not innocent Blood in this Place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt; then I will cause you to dwell in this Place. Behold ye trust in lying Words which cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit Adultery, and swear falsely, and burn Incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this House which is called by my Name, and say, We are delivered to do all these Abominations (o)? Thus saith the Lord, The Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth is my Footstool: Where is the House that ye build unto me? And where is the Place of my Rest? For all these Things hath my Hand made, and all these Things have been, saith the Lord: But to this Man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite Spirit, and trembleth at my Word. He that killeth an Ox, is as if he slew a Man: He that sacrificeth a Lamb, as

(l) Mark xii. 33.

(m) Mic. vi. 8.

(n) Hof. vi. 6.

(o) Jer. vii. 4—10.



if he cut off a Dog's Neck; he that offereth an Oblation, as if he offered Swines Blood; he that burneth Incense, as if he blessed an Idol (p). Behold, ye fast for Strife and Debate, and to smite with the Fist of Wickedness; ye shall not fast as ye do this Day, to make your Voice to be heard on high. Is it such a Fast that I have chosen? a Day for a Man to afflict his Soul? Is it to bow down his Head as a Bulrush, and to spread Sackcloth and Ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a Fast and an acceptable Day to the Lord? Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every Yoke? Is it not to deal thy Bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out, to thy House? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from thine own Flesh? If thou draw out thy Soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted Soul; Then shall thy Light rise in Obscurity, and thy Darknes be as the Noon-day (q). To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord? I am full of the Burnt-offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts, and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or Lambs, or He-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand to tread my Courts? Bring no more vain Oblations, Incense is an Abomination to me, the New Moons and Sabbaths, the calling of Assemblies I cannot away with. It is Iniquity, even the Solemn Meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed Feasts my Soul hateth, they are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye

(p) If. lxvi. 1—3.

(q) lviii. 3—10.

spread forth your Hands I will hide mine Eyes from you : Tea, when you make many Prayers I will not hear. Your Hands are full of Blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings from before mine Eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek Judgment, relieve the Oppressed, judge the Fatherless, plead for the Widow (r). I will not reprove thee for thy Sacrifices or Burnt-offerings to have been continually before me. I will take no Bullock out of thy House, nor He-goats out of thy Fields. For every Beast of the Forest is mine, and the Cattle upon a thousand Hills. I know all the Fowls of the Mountains, and the wild Beasts of the Fields are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee ; for the World is mine, and the Fullness thereof. Will I eat the Flesh of Bulls, or drink the Blood of Goats ? Offer unto God Thanksgiving, and pay thy Vows unto the most High. And call upon me in the Day of Trouble. I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me (s). Whoso offereth Praise glorifieth me : and to him that ordereth his Conversation aright, will I shew the Salvation of God (t). And to go yet something higher, we have this excellent Description of Religion in the Book of Job. Behold, the Fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom ; and to depart from Evil is Understanding (u). By these Passages of the Old Testament it may be seen, that the Substance of Religion was the same under both Dispensations ; and that Christ, addressing himself to those who were born under the former, justly says, *All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even so to them : For this is the Law and the Prophets* (x). I was willing to bring these Texts of Scripture together in one

(r) *Is. i. 11—17.* (s) *Psal. 8—15.* (t) *ver. 23.* (u) *Job xxviii. 28.* (x) *Mat. vii. 12.*

View, that the Adversaries of *Reveal'd Religion* might see (what they seem to have over-looked) *viz.* that under the various Dispensations from the Creation to the Gospel State, the Essence of true Religion was always represented as consisting of Sobriety, Righteousness, and Godliness. For if we were to form a Judgment of it from their Accounts of Revelation, a Person unacquainted with the Scriptures might really think, that the great End of them was to tell Mankind, that it matter'd not how little internal Religion they had, if they were but punctual in the Observance of external Rites. The Texts which I have singled out, are sufficient to manifest the contrary; and had they been found in any other Writers, we should, I doubt not, have been tired with Panegyrics on the Beauty of the Descriptions, and Justness of the Sentiments, which being contain'd in Books esteem'd Sacred, are neglected and pass'd over in Silence. Had then our Author contented himself with shewing the *Subordination* of *Positive* to *Moral Precepts*, (as he would certainly have had the Scripture on his Side, so,) I am persuaded, no sober and judicious *Christian* would have opposed him. But since he hath set himself against all *Positive Institutions*, without Distinction, it is necessary to consider what he has advanced with Acuteness and Subtlety enough.

But first I would crave leave to premise, that there is a Difference between a *Positive* and an *Arbitrary* Command, though our Author blends these Terms together as if they were perfectly synonymous. An *Arbitrary Precept* is a Command founded not on any Reason at all, but supposed to proceed from the *meer Will* and *Pleasure* of the Commander. A *Positive Precept* is such, as though not evidently founded on a Reason, which those to whom it is given could discern,



cern, may be supposed to be attended with the highest Reason in the Superior Understanding which enjoined it ; and that Reason, though not antecedently discoverable, may sometimes shew itself afterwards even to those who are the Subjects of the Command. It may, perhaps, justly be question'd, whether to the Divine Understanding, before which the whole Compass of Things with their infinitely complicated Relations, are always open at one View, it can be supposed that two different Methods of Acting should appear equally capable of answering the same End. But if that be a supposeable Case, there is not the least Difficulty in conceiving that, where in the Reason of Things there can be no Preference, *Mere Will* should determine. And in this Sense only can an *Allwise Being* ever be supposed to act or command *Arbitrarily*. But nothing is more easily conceivable, than that God should enjoin his Creatures such Things as He saw to be reasonable and fit, though that Fitness might not antecedently be discoverable by them. And of this Nature, chiefly, are those Precepts which, as *Christians*, we are obliged to defend.

2. Having clearly explain'd the Meaning of an *Arbitrary* Precept, and shewn in what Sense only the Almighty can be supposed to act *Arbitrarily*, *viz.* in the determining by Pleasure these Things (if any such there are) which could not be determin'd by Reason ; we shall have no occasion to concern ourselves with any of those tragical Consequences which the ingenious Author truly deduces from the Notion of God's acting *Arbitrarily* in another Sense, *viz.* in being guided by Sovereign Pleasure in opposition to Reason.

3. When God is said to give a Command in the way of *Trial* ; the Meaning, doubtless, cannot be, that He intends to inform Himself by that Means,  
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in what Manner his Creatures will act. A little Candour would help a Man to understand such an Expression, as used in Condescension to the Language of Mortals: and to see that the true Meaning of it was only this, That God, by this Method, gave an Opportunity to any particular Person, of approving the Sincerity of his Obedience to his own Conscience, and to the World. If our Author can shew, that no possible good End can be served by such an Experiment, we will allow him to call it *Tyrannical*. But till he hath done that, he must permit us to think, that such a Conduct may be consistent with the most consummate Wisdom.

4. Though *Symbolical Representations* may need the Assistance of Words to explain them; it cannot from thence be concluded, 'that they are 'incapable of expressing Things more fully than 'Words, and consequently are wholly needless 'as to that Purpose.' For what is *Spoken* well, may affect the Mind in some measure; but what is *Spoken* and *Acted* too, will certainly affect it much more.

*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,  
Quàm quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, & quæ  
Ipse sibi tradit Spectator— (γ)*

was the Sentiment of one who seems to have had as true a Knowledge of Human Nature as any Man. The Saying, 'that Vulgar Minds are only 'capable of receiving Impressions from sensible 'Objects,' was, I doubt not, design'd as a very great Compliment to Men of a superior Genius. But, perhaps, it may be taken quite otherwise. Had Man been originally fram'd without bodily Organs or Passions, that is a *pure Spirit*; he

(γ) Hor. Art. Poet. l. 180.

would,

would, no doubt, have been a more Noble and God-like Creature. But as he is now constituted with both, and these capable of serving very valuable Purposes in the present State, to say of any Man, that he is insensible to every Thing that passes without, or incapable of being moved by it, is, in my Apprehension, but an ill kind of a Compliment. Unthinking Persons, indeed, may be influenced in an undue Manner by external Representations; and, when they are used in Religion, may lay more Stress on them than they deserve; and, for this Reason, the true Use of them should at the same Time be explain'd, and the Abuse guarded against by all proper Methods. But this can be no Reason for laying them aside, unless it could be proved, that the *probable Mischiefs* arising from the Abuse, would more than counterballance the *probable Advantages* that might attend the regular Use of them.

5. ' That the Mind may be over-loaded as well as the Body, and the more it is taken up with the Observation of Things which are not of a Moral Nature, the less it will be able to attend to Things which are; ' is certainly true. And this may justly be urged as a good Argument, in the General, against loading Religion with *positive* Precepts, and will also shew, that those few which are mixed with those of a *Moral Nature*, should be so contrived as to become subservient to *Morality*. That there is a great Proneness in Mankind to Superstition, and that they are apt to substitute external Rites in the Room of real Religion, is also a certain Truth. And for this Reason alone, (was there no other) I think, *Christians* should be cautious of adding to the Sacred Rites, appointed in Scripture, any others of human Invention. But that, upon this Account, it becomes unreasonable to suppose that  
God



God Himself should enjoin any External Rites, seems not so clear. The appointing some Rites, does not necessarily lead Men to the Neglect of Morality. If these are so calculated as to have a Natural Tendency to promote a regard to Moral Precepts, they will certainly answer that End with Minds virtuously disposed. If at the same Time they are appointed, they are as expressly as is possible declared subordinate to Moral Duties, (which has been shewn to be the Case) nothing but a *perverse* and *corrupt* Mind can incline Men to think otherwise. The same *perverse* and wicked Disposition, will lead such Persons to find out other Methods of cheating themselves, and being easy in their Vices, if this Handle was removed. For how many, who set little Value on *positive* Institutions, are apt to satisfy themselves with one Part of Morality in the room of another? *e. g.* with Justice without Sobriety, or Sobriety without Justice, and Almsgiving without either? Now where is the Absurdity in supposing, that God may appoint certain External Rites, which *naturally* tend to serve the Cause of Virtue; and will answer that End with all *well-disposed Minds*, though He sees that *vitious* Persons, in Contradiction to His *express* Declarations, from a Disposition which otherwise would lead them some way or other to make Vice easy to them, will perversely substitute these Rites in the Place of Matters of much more Importance? Is not this perfectly agreeable with the general Conduct of His Moral Providence, by which He gives various Opportunities to Mankind of discovering the Truth or Falsehood of their Pretensions to Virtue? We are asked, 'If Things of this Nature are once admitted into Religion, where shall we stop?' I answer easily and plainly, where God Himself has stopped, and expressly forbidden us to proceed

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farther. And truly, considering the Inclination which there is in Mankind to something External, and that perhaps reasonably founded on the Constitution of Human Nature; I believe it will appear, that God's appointing a few useful External Rites, and at the same Time prohibiting the Use of all others of Human Invention, is the most effectual Preservative against Superstition that could be imagined. For if nothing of this kind had been fixed by Divine Appointment, Men might, perhaps, not unreasonably have thought that they might devise some proper Rites of themselves; and where they would have stopped after they had once begun, is not indeed easy to say. But when it is supposed that God hath taken this Work into His own Hands, it must be imagin'd that He hath compleated the Design, especially when He has expressly forbid any Additions to His Appointment. I could wish the general Practice of *Christians* would allow me to urge this Argument with greater Strength. But though the several Parties of *Christians* have all of them, perhaps, more or less, incorporated their own Inventions with the Worship of God, yet this is but one among numberless other Instances, in which they have forgot the Rules of their Religion; and upon themselves alone, but not upon their Religion, will the Blame of this be thrown by all impartial Judges, as long as these Words are to be found in the Gospel, *In vain do they worship me, teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men* (z).

6. The supposing some few *positive* Precepts to be added by Revelation to the *Moral* ones, (if this is what our Author means by *equally commanded*) has not the least Tendency to make Men

(z) Mat. xv. 9.

think they are *alike necessary*. But if by *equally commanded*, he means that an *equal Stress* is laid upon each, that has been shewn to be a Mistake in Fact. And nothing can be more evident, than that the enjoining *positive* Precepts in *subordination* to *Morality*, has a plain Tendency to make Men believe that they are *not* alike necessary. What he adds concerning the Disposition of Men to abuse such Precepts to Superstitious Purposes, hath been sufficiently answer'd already.

7. ' That the most vicious Persons applaud in others those Moral Virtues which they neglect themselves, ' is an unanswerable Argument of the Beauty of Holiness. ' That the Case is otherwise with positive Institutions, and that no Man rejects any of these himself, but he is willing that all others should do so too, ' may, I believe, justly be disputed. If it was allow'd to be Fact, no more, perhaps, could be inferred from it, than that, in the Apprehension of such Persons, *positive* Institutions were of less Use to Mankind than Moral Precepts; which is very true. But suppose we might from hence conclude, that, in their Apprehension, Things of a *positive* Nature were not at all serviceable to the general Good of Mankind, this would be no more than their particular Sentiments of the Matter, which is of little Consequence. The Merits of the Cause are not to be judged by *Authority*, but by the Reason of the Thing.

8. It is very justly observed, to the Honour of the *Christian* Religion, that it contains very few *positive* Precepts, and that the far greatest Part concerns the Practice of everlasting Righteousness. That *Christianity* would have been a *more perfect Religion*, if it had been entirely free from positive Institutions, may, in a Sense, be admitted. But it would then, probably, have been too per-



fect for the present imperfect Circumstances of Mankind. A *multitude* of External Rites would have over-loaded the Mind, and diverted it from the weightier Matters of the Law. But *a few*, well-chosen, may be of Service to *Morality*, and be of Use to train up our weak Minds for a more noble State, in which, when that which is now imperfect shall be done away, Religion shall be reduced again to its original Simplicity and Perfection, *viz.* *Piety, Self-Government, and Benevolence.*

9. *Positive Institutions*, appointed by God, are no more inconsistent with the *Liberty* allowed by the *Law of Nature*, than the *particular Laws* of Civil Societies are inconsistent with that Liberty. There is not, indeed, the least Shadow of an Inconsistency in either Case. For it is a Part of the *Law of Nature*, that Men should submit to the *Civil Laws of their Country*, which, though not properly Parts of the *Law of Nature*, are founded in that *Law*, as they are to be supposed calculated for the Good of the Society. And it is equally a Part of the *Law of Nature*, that Men should obey such *Laws given by God*, which, though not properly Parts of the *Law of Nature*, are founded in it, and, being appointed by God, must be supposed to be *certainly*, what the others are but *probably*, for the general Good. And it is highly irrational to say, that Almighty God cannot do that by His Authority, which the meanest Earthly Princes may do by theirs.

10. None of the Precepts of Revelation are *indifferent*, so as to be without a Foundation in Reason, or useless to Men. And if the contrary will prove them to be Parts of the *Law of Nature*, we may allow, that thus far the Gospel is only a Republication of that Law. A more particular  
Reply

Reply to this Paragraph may be collected from what hath been observed under another Head.

11. Considering the infinite Variety of Circumstances, &c. it may be supposed, that the Observance of a *positive Precept* may, upon some Occasions, interfere with a Moral one. Nor are any positive Rules so immutably fixed, as not to yield to the Moral in such Circumstances.

12. There is nothing so innocent, but that Men of an ill Disposition may make a Handle of to serve their wicked Purposes. But nothing is more unreasonable, than to use the Divine Appointment of some positive Rites as an Handle for Human Impositions, when the same Divine Authority, which is supposed to enjoin the one, as expressly forbids the other.

13. External Force and Violence, are the most improper Methods that can be taken, to work a real Conviction in the Mind. And therefore, supposing Men were persuaded that their Salvation depended upon the Belief of any Truth *merely Speculative*, yet they might see, if they reason'd justly, that upon that Account all *compulsive* Methods must be laid aside, and no other Force used but that of Argument. And though Religion be made the Pretence, there is too much Reason to think, that Pride, Ambition, and Covetousness have been the true Springs of all those Persecutions, which have been set on foot under a more specious Colour. For if a Sense of Religious Obligation, though from a mistaken Conscience, had been the real or principal Motive, *that* must have led Men to have spent their Zeal at least *equally* against *Immorality*, which is certainly *equally* destructive of Salvation.

14. The Patrons of *Persecution* might, with as good Reason, have supported themselves by *Natural Religion*, as by the *Christian*. For that Spirit  
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of Wickedness is not more expressly condemn'd by *Natural Light*, than by the Gospel. *This* plainly declares, that *the Son of Man came not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them* (a) : That *Christ's Kingdom is not of this World* (b). That *the Servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves* (c). And, finally, that *the Wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated : But that where Envy and Strife is, there is Confusion, and every Evil Work. This Wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish* (d). The only Thing in the Scriptures which can, with any Colour, be alledged in support of Persecution, is the severe Punishments appointed by the Law of *Moses* to be inflicted on *Idolaters*. But as these are evidently founded on Reasons peculiar to that *Theocracy* (e), it might easily be perceived, that they could be extended no farther ; especially when the *New Testament* has set the whole Matter in so clear a Light as we have seen.

15. ' The supposing Things *positive* in Religion, of which *Reason* affords no Light how they are to be perform'd, or even what they are, ' does not *necessarily* infer that Mankind must lie under endless Doubts and Fears about them ; since it is possible that these may be clearly marked out, and the manner of performing them may be plain'y specified by Revelation. So that, upon this Account, those who live under Revelation will not be in a worse Condition than others. The intrinsick Goodness of all Moral Precepts is

(a) Luke ix. 56. (b) John xviii. 36. (c) 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. (d) Jam. iii. 15—17. (e) See Mr. Locke's first Letter of Toleration, among his Works in Folio, Vol. 2. Page 247.



unquestionably a very great Recommendation of them, as it inclines Men to delight in their Duty while they are practising it. But this is not an Advantage peculiar to *Natural Religion*. The Good Christian enjoys it in common with the Deist, since the greatest Part of Christianity consists in these Duties. And as for those peculiar Precepts of the Gospel which are called *positive*, and which, as to the particular *Circumstances* of them, perhaps, are *merely* so; yet even these may be plainly seen, *in their general Tendency*, to be for the Good of those that observe them, and useful to strengthen Moral Obligations. Thus the Publick declaring the Members of Christ's Kingdom to be such by a visible Rite, expressing the Purity of the Gospel, has a Natural Tendency to remind them of their Obligation to obey the holy and excellent Laws of that Kingdom. And to this is the Use of *Baptism* ascribed, which is represented as Saving, not by putting away the Filth of the Flesh, but by the Answer of a good Conscience towards God. The commemorating the many Blessings procured to Mankind by the Death of Christ, in a Religious Feast, has a Tendency to enforce his Laws from a Principle of Gratitude, and to maintain the Unity of his Kingdom. The worshipping God by a *Mediator* of His own Appointment (*f*), (by which is meant not so much the

(*f*) What is here said of the Notion of a Mediator, is design'd to obviate the Objections of our Author on that Head, which, as they could not conveniently be brought into the View of his Main Argument, it may not be improper to insert in this Place. 'Tis to this Absurdity of debasing God, and cloathing Him with our Infirmities, and judging of Him by ourselves, that the Mediatory Gods amongst the Heathens owe their Rise.— Had they believed a Supreme Being was every where, and at all Times knew their Thoughts, they could never have taken such a round-about way of addressing Him; who not  
only

the addressing the *Mediator* to make known our Requests to God, as the addressing God in the Name of the Mediator) this Method of worshipping God, I say, when rightly understood, as it is not at all inconsistent with his Omniscience or Omnipresence, (who is still supposed the ultimate Object of Worship) nor any Reflection on His Original Goodness, (which is supposed to be the Ground of His appointing a Mediator) so may it be seen to have a Tendency to increase our Humility ; and, by putting us in Mind of our Sinfulness, become a very proper Motive to Repentance ; and (which the Scripture seems chiefly to insist on) it evidently tends to encourage repenting Sinners to address the Divine Being with greater Hopes of Acceptance. And though the Appointment of a *Mediator* could be known only by Revelation ; that when such a one is appointed

‘ only knew what they desired, but their real Wants, and what  
 ‘ would relieve them, better than any Mediatory Beings what-  
 ‘ ever.’

B. ‘ They addressed to Mediatory Beings, to shew their greater  
 ‘ Respect to the Supreme Being; and their own unworthiness  
 ‘ to approach Him.’

A. ‘ This shews what unworthy Notions they had of the Su-  
 ‘ preme Being; since it would be an Affront even to a Tempo-  
 ‘ ral Prince, if he was present, and heard every Thing you said,  
 ‘ not to address him, but to another, to let the Prince know  
 ‘ what you wanted from him.’

‘ The Heathen must think, if they thought at all, that those  
 ‘ Mediatory Gods, could either suggest to the Supreme God some  
 ‘ Reasons He before was ignorant of; or that by their Impor-  
 ‘ tunities they could prevail on his Weakness, to do what other-  
 ‘ wise He was not willing to do.’

‘ The Heathen Notion, as it suppos’d the Supreme God either  
 ‘ ignorant or weak; so it made the Mediatory Gods to have a  
 ‘ greater Kindness for and Readiness to do Good to Mankind; and  
 ‘ that their Solicitations made Him better natur’d than other-  
 ‘ wise He would be. This, of Course, took off their Love  
 ‘ from the Supreme, and placed it on those Mediatory Gods,  
 ‘ upon whose powerful Intercessions they so much depended.’

*Christianity*, &c. Page 86.

by

by God, we should reverence him accordingly, is a Dictate of Natural Light. The separating that Day of the Week, on which Christ rose again from the Dead and enter'd upon his Mediatorial Office, for the Purposes of Religion, and especially for Publick Worship; as it is of Use to preserve the Memory of that Important Fact; will also be of Service for the more regular Performance of those Duties of Piety which the Religion of Nature equally requires. *The selecting an Order of Men*, whose particular Profession it should be to study the Sacred Records, and enforce the Observation of them, as well as to conduct the Publick Worship, must be acknowledged to have a Tendency to promote the Advantage of the Society, and to render the Publick Worship more instructive; especially when these are consider'd not as Lords over God's Heritage, but (as the Scripture represents them) Examples to the Flock, and accountable for their Trust, not only to *Christ*, but to the *Christian Church*, for whose sake they were appointed. These are the only Things of a *positive Nature* which are enjoined by Precept, or recommended by Example, in the *New Testament*, so as to infer a general Obligation. And though it must be confessed, most of them, in the dark Ages of the Church, have been abused to Superstitious and Tyrannical Purposes; yet, taking them as they were first instituted, they appear excellently useful; and the Service of them to promote Substantial Religion, has been attested by the Experience of Numbers of Good Men (who, in this, must be acknowledged the most competent Judges) in all Ages. ' That the Observation of these Institutions may, at some times, expose Christians to Persecution, is very true; and that, even in these Circumstances, they are, notwithstanding, obliged to observe  
I them,



them, cannot, I think, be denied, without contradicting almost every Page of the *New Testament*. Neither is there any more Difficulty in this Hypothesis, than in the Supposition of a Good Man's suffering for his Integrity in any other Instance. The Case of a *Martyr* in Religion, is the same as that of a *Patriot* in the State. Both suffer in a Good Cause, and lay down their Life for the Publick Service. For as it has been proved that *Christianity* is a general Blessing, the suffering for the Use of those Rites by which the Profession of it is maintained in the World, (how indifferent soever they are in themselves) must be consider'd as a suffering for the common Benefit of Mankind. And as the *Patriot* is supposed to be entitled to a peculiar Reward in the future Life, according to all the Principles of Natural Religion; so, according to the Representations of Scripture, the *Confessor* and *Martyr* shall have a distinguishing Recompence at the Resurrection of the Just: *If we suffer with Christ, we are assured that we shall be glorified together; and that these Sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall hereafter be revealed in us (g)*. So that if upon this Account a *Christian* is under any Disadvantage, compared with others in this Life, that shall be abundantly compensated by his peculiar Reward in the World to come. 'That Natural Religion is capable of strict Demonstration,' I acknowledge. But whether the Bulk of Mankind are able to pursue that Demonstration, and whether the Evidence upon which these receive it amounts so high, may reasonably be contested. From the Regularity, Beauty, and Usefulness of the Universe, it is very obvious to conclude, that, *if it was made*, the Author of it

(g) Rom. viii. 17, 18.

must be some Intelligent, Wise, and Good Being. That it was made, and is not *Self-existent*, will appear, even to an ordinary Understanding, much the most natural Opinion. But the strict *Demonstration* of this, which must be fetched from the Incompatibility of the Ideas, of any Thing finite or material, with the Notion of Self-existence, is an Argument not very level to common Capacities. These are determined to the Belief of Natural Religion by the same kind of *Moral Evidence* on which they also receive Revelation: And very reasonable is it that they should be governed in their Assent by those *probable* Proofs which are within their Reach. No *Traditional Religion* can be attended with Evidence *strictly Demonstrative*, for the Reasons which our Author suggests. But *immediate Revelation* may have the greatest Proof. They to whom the Revelations contained in the Scripture were *originally* made, *viz.* the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, had even *intuitive* Proof that God spoke to them, and were equally certain of their own Inspiration and Illumination, as of the Truths of Natural Religion: Or rather more certain, since they knew the one by Intuition; and they could not discover the other but by tracing them up through a long Series of Arguments to their Self-evident Notions. So that *original* and *immediate* Revelation is capable of *equal*, if not *superior*, Evidence, to *Natural Religion*. And though *This* is indeed, in its own Nature, capable of higher Proof than any *Traditional Revelation*; yet there is Reason to believe, that even *that* is capable of as strong Evidence as that on which the generality of Mankind (who are not used to Metaphysical Reasonings) receive the Truths of Natural Religion. In what manner such as pretend to Original Revelations may satisfy their Cotemporaries and

Countrymen of the Truth of their Pretensions, we shall consider under the next Head. But supposing these Revelations to have been committed to Writing by those to whom they were said to have been made, or publish'd by their Direction, at the same Time, and Place; the Proof of the Genuineness of these Writings to Men in future Ages must be the same with that of all other ancient Records. That *these* have sometimes been forged, and at other times corrupted, is a good Reason for a careful and critical Examination. But it is no Reason for rejecting them in the Lump, without any Examination at all. No Man is so ridiculous as to take this Method in Civil Records, and it is highly unjust to reject Religious Records upon Evidence, which would equally conclude against those of another Nature, which we retain with the utmost Fondness. Let the Forgery or Corruption be proved, and then let the Writings be treated with the Contempt which they will deserve. But let not the Suspicion of these Things, only from a bare Possibility, be admitted, where not the least Mark of Forgery or Corruption can be shewn. *Time*, consider'd in itself, can make no Alteration in the Nature of Evidence. It cannot make the same Thing probable in one Age, and improbable in another. What Alterations it may accidentally produce, will be consider'd hereafter. But let us apply this general Reasoning to the Case of *Christianity*. The Proofs on which we now at this Time receive the Gospel, are, in general, the same with those on which the first *Christians* embraced it, *viz.* the Marks of Divine Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, which are discover'd in it. The great Difference between us and them is, that what they receiv'd from the first Hands, we have by Tradition from them which hath conveyed



veyed down to us the Apostolical Writings. This is the only Evidence on which we receive all other Books of equal Antiquity, *viz.* a constant Tradition, which is ever, in such Cases, to be received, where there is no Evidence to the contrary. That the four Gospels contain a true Account of the Doctrine and Life of *Jesus*, there is the same Reason to believe as can be alledged for the Credit of the best Ancient Histories. They were wrote at the Time when *Christianity* was first published, and by those who were Eye and Ear Witnesses of the Facts which they related, or else received their Accounts from those who were. That the Epistles ascribed to *Paul* are his genuine Works, can with no more Reason be question'd, than we can doubt of the Genuineness of the Epistles of *Cicero* or *Seneca*. And supposing the Genuineness of *Paul's* Epistles, the Argument from thence to the Truth of that great Fact on which *Christianity* is built, I mean the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, amounts, as near as any Thing of that kind can, to a Demonstration (*b*). In short, there is *all the Evidence* of the Genuineness of these Scriptures that we could well expect, supposing them to be genuine: And he is, surely, an unreasonable Man that desires any more.

2. Whatever Religion pretends to be of Divine Authority must carry *internal* Marks of the high Original it pretends to; otherwise it will deserve to be rejected as Imposture. If 'Revelation differ'd in nothing from Natural Religion but in 'the Manner of Communication,' (as this Author pretends) the same *internal* Evidence which recommends the one, would equally establish the

(*b*) See this Argument managed to the best Advantage in the first Essay of *Miscellanea Sacra*, to which the Adversaries of Revelation have had the Wisdom not to attempt any Reply.

other. And if Revelation should be supposed to add any external Proof, as it would be all *ex abundanti*, there will be the less Occasion of discussing nicely the exact Force of it. But, in Truth, though Revelation was no other than a Republication of the Religion of Nature, the external Evidence of Miracles would not be useless. For they would, at least, be of Service to gain a better Attention to the Divine Teacher from a careless unthinking vicious World, which, in whatever Circumstances it can be supposed to need such a Republication, will equally require something extraordinary to gain it a fair and impartial Hearing. If the Miracles said to have been perform'd by the Publishers of Revelation were consider'd only in this View, they would not, I believe, be thought superfluous. But if Revelation really contains Things distinct from Natural Religion, such as, though no way contrary to Reason, are impossible to be discover'd by it ; the Use of Miracles to attest these Things, will more clearly appear. I do not say, that even in this Case they are *absolutely necessary* as Proofs. For if a Person of known Integrity, and a sound Judgment, should, upon his own Word, assure me, that he had received a Revelation from God ; if the Matter of the Revelation was worthy of such an Author, and the Person pretending to have received it, neither before or after discover'd in his Conduct the least Marks of Enthusiasm or Dishonesty ; a wise Man would, perhaps, do well to pay it some Regard. In this Sense, I think, we are to understand these Words of our Saviour: *Though I bear Record of my self, yet my Record is true : For I know whence I came, and whither I go* (i). But, considering the Weakness of Hu-

(i) John viii. 14.

man Minds, and the Danger of the Imagination's being imposed upon, an external Sign of Power or Knowledge, more than Human, must be a considerable Confirmation. Upon this Account in another Place he says, *If I bear witness of my self, my witness is not true, i. e. it will not so easily be admitted for Truth; there is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the Truth.—But I have a greater witness than that of John: For the Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me (k).* Before we receive any Traditional Religion, we must, indeed, be well satisfied that the Propagators of it were not imposed upon themselves, nor would willingly impose upon others, (and this Satisfaction we have, as to the Publishers of the Gospel,) but how this amounts to being *infallible* and *impeccable*, I do not understand. Supposing the Genuineness of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, it is evident, that *Jesus* and his Disciples were Men of Integrity and Sedateness. As for the Character of *Jesus* himself, that indeed was perfectly Spotless, as became the Son of God and Saviour of the World. And there was nothing in his whole Conduct that looked like Enthusiasm. The Closeness of his Reasonings, the Clearness of his Expressions, the Aptness of his Similitudes, the Wariness of his Answers, and the great Prudence of his whole Management, plainly shew, that as he had a warm Heart, so he had a cool Head; and that he exactly observed the Maxim which he had taught his Disciples, happily blending the Wisdom of the Serpent with the Innocence of the Dove. His

(k) John v. 31—37.



sealing the Truth of his Doctrine with his Blood, was an additional Evidence of his Sincerity. For though a Man's dying for any Opinion will not prove the Truth of it, it will be a very strong Proof, that he who suffers believes it to be true. I will not here stand to dispute how far Pride, Obstinacy, or a Love of Fame, may be supposed to carry a Man. Let us suppose, (which yet might reasonably admit a Debate) that from a Stiffness of Temper, and a false Notion of Honour, a Man, with the perfect Exercise of his Reason, and in the very Prime of his Years, might be induced to relinquish Life, and deliberately yield to an ignominious and tormenting Death, only for the sake of being admired afterwards by a few for his Firmness and Constancy. But may I not be allowed to ask, Where were there the least Symptoms of such a Temper to be seen in the meek and holy *Jesus*? Where did the Seeds of such a Passion lie so long latent, which had never discover'd themselves till, it seems, they broke out all at once in his Death? Had Ambition sway'd him, it would certainly have carried him another way. He would hardly have sought for Honour on a Cross, or expected Glory in the Grave. This would rather have inclin'd him to strike in with the current Humour of the Times, and have set up for such a Messiah as the *Jews* expected. Those who were his greatest Enemies, would have supported him in these Pretensions. For it is manifest, that the Meanness of his Appearance (so contrary to the then received Notion of the Christ) was that which chiefly prejudiced them against him. They could not deny but that he did great Miracles, and also *spake so as never Man spake*. The grand Objection was, that he did not answer their Opinion of the Messiah, and for this Reason they concluded that he

was

was an Impostor. Now, if he had no other than worldly Motives in View, how easily might he have removed this Difficulty, by suiting the Character of himself to the common Opinion? On the contrary, he industriously declined those Honours which the Multitude (convinced by his Miracles that *he was of a Truth that Prophet which should come into the World*) would have conferred upon him. *When Jesus perceived that they would come by force and make him a King, he departed again into a Mountain himself alone.* And this is so very plain, that one of the greatest Adversaries of *Christianity* that ever appear'd in the World, was, by the meer Force of Truth, obliged to confess, that in all the Life of *Jesus* there was not the least Mark of a worldly Design.— What has been said of *Jesus*, may, with some Variation, be applied to his Apostles. They, indeed, were meer Men, and as such were subject to those Infirmities of Human Nature, from which their Great Master was exempt. But notwithstanding those Miscarriages, which by Surprize or Inadvertency they fell into, at some Times, and which they as honestly relate of themselves, their general Character is that of sincere Persons, as their Sufferings for the Gospel is a good Testimony. They were, for the most part, destitute of a liberal Education, and some of them, perhaps, of no extraordinary Natural Endowments. But they were nevertheless fit Witnesses of a plain Matter of Fact, which fell under the Cognizance of their Senses, and of which every one that had Eyes and Ears was capable of judging, *viz.* whether their Master was risen from the Dead, and conversed with them, and in their Sight ascended into Heaven. Nor do they appear Credulous. On the contrary, such was the Force of their *Jewish* Pre-  
K judices

judices upon observing his Death, that they could hardly be brought to believe that he was risen ; and one of them remained incredulous, till he was convinced by the most compleat Evidence of all his Senses. These are briefly the Grounds upon which we believe the Testimony of *Jesus* and of his Apostles, and by which we are persuaded that they could not be deceived themselves, nor wilfully design to impose upon others. As for the Miracles which were wrought by Christ and his Apostles, they were of such a Nature, that they can never, with the least Shadow of Reason, be supposed to be perform'd by any juggling Tricks, or be the Effects of Fancy. The Gifts of the Holy Ghost especially, must, in this View, be consider'd as unexceptionable. How far superior Spirits, unless restrain'd by God, may be conceiv'd capable of answering these Phœnomena, I think, it is impossible for us to determine. And that, whatever Natural Abilities these may have, they shall, in certain Cases, be limited by the Divine Power, (though no improbable Hypothesis) cannot certainly be proved. The only Consequence from which is, that the Argument from Miracles is not in the Nature of *Demonstration*, but *strong Probability*. And where the manifest Tendency of any Scheme of Doctrine is to destroy Sin ; as there is the highest Reason to think that evil Spirits cannot be concern'd in a Cause directly opposite to their Interests ; so there is all imaginable Reason to suppose, that the Works, exceeding Human Power, which are perform'd to attest it, were wrought either immediately by God, or else by His Appointment. I will only add, that as the Evidence of *Traditional Revelation* is, by all Rational Writers, allow'd to be of a *Moral Nature*, and not *strictly Demonstrative* ;  
it



it may justly be wonder'd at, that Men should strain a Point only to make one Part of the Evidence higher than it can well go, when, after all, by all the Rules of Right Reasoning, the Conclusion must follow the weaker Premise. If our Christian Writers on *Miracles* had enough consider'd this, it would have prevented their running into some Absurdities.

XI. I. ' Religion, as it is a Thing of general Concern, must be supposed to be level to all Capacities; ' and if the Poor are to have the Gospel preached to them, it must be such a one as they are capable of understanding. Not only the Proof of *Christianity* in general, but the particular important Doctrines of it, must be within the Reach of the Vulgar as well as the Learned. For there cannot possibly be any Obligation on reasonable Creatures to believe without Evidence, or to assent without Ideas. Whosoever therefore believes the *Christian* Religion to be of God, and design'd for a standing Religion, must imagine that it is attended with a standing Evidence; and that, at least, in all the Important Branches of it, it is easily intelligible even to the meanest Capacities. That a *Traditional Religion*, after a great Distance of Time, should, in all Parts, be so clear, and the Evidence, in every Respect, so strong, as when it was first promulgated; cannot, indeed, reasonably be expected. For sensible Evidence will, in its own Nature, be superior to Human Testimony. The Sentiments of any Teacher will better be understood by those who knew and convers'd with him living, than by perusing his Writings long after his Death. Revealed Truths, when committed to Writing, will be subject, in some measure, to the same Inconveniences that all other Writings are liable to.

Copies passing through variety of Hands, may, by Ignorance or Design, be corrupted, and the Errors of the first Copy be multiplied in the second ; and on comparing any Number of Copies, abundance of various Readings will necessarily result. When Writings are to be translated from one Language into another, it will be impossible, from the very Nature of Language, to express the Original always in its full Force ; and the Difficulty will be the greater, when a Language long since dead, is to be translated into the living Language of a Country as distant in Place as Time. Those who have no Knowledge of the Original must take up with the best reputed Versions. And supposing these Versions to be made with the utmost Judgment and Fidelity, the peculiar Idioms of the Original Language, the Allusions to the Customs of the Times in which the Author himself lived, &c. will unavoidably render the understanding of them more difficult. All this must be acknowledged. And besides, in Matters of Religion, where unhappy Errors, founded only on the Mistake of ancient Phrases, have once prevail'd, it will be very difficult to remove the Impression which has been made by the meer Sound of Words ; or convince the Generality of the Falsehood of Traditional Interpretations, though they are directly contrary to the Critical Sense of the Original. Upon this Account it must, I think, be allowed, that the first *Christians* had very much the Advantage of succeeding Ages. They received the Doctrine of the Gospel in the greatest Purity, *immediately*, from the Authentick Teachers of it, *viz.* the Apostles and Apostolick Men ; and were Eye-Witnesses of the Demonstration of the Spirit and of the Power, by which their Doctrine was confirm'd.

firm'd. Whatsoever was deliver'd by *these*, especially the Apostles, either by Word or Writing, as from the Lord, they were convinced must be the true Doctrine of Christ. The Gospel being preach'd to them in their Mother Tongue, all the Idioms or Peculiarities of it were well understood by them, as they had been used to them from their Cradles. The Customs alluded to in the Sermons, or Epistles of the Apostles, were also perfectly known. Besides; if they had still any Doubt concerning the true Doctrine of *Christianity* in any particular Case; they had the Apostles at hand to consult. And that they actually made use of this Privilege we may learn from the first Epistle of St. *Paul* to the *Corinthians*, which is chiefly spent in resolving such Cases as the Church of *Corinth* had in their Letter proposed to him. And though, in the purest Times, there were not wanting those who corrupted the Word of God by a Mixture of impure Doctrines; they had always a sure Rule to examine the Pretensions of those false Teachers by, *viz.* the comparing their Doctrine with that of the Apostles, who plainly told them, *If we or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel to you than we have preached unto you, let him be Anathema.* Upon these Accounts, I say, it cannot be denied, that the first *Christians* had greatly the Advantage of all succeeding Ages. The true Doctrines of *Christianity* are now only to be learned from the Apostolical Writings: The Language in which these were originally compiled, hath now, for several Ages, ceased to be the Vulgar Tongue of the greatest Part of *Christendom*. Hence it comes to pass, that Phrases and Customs which are therein contain'd, though *then* well understood, are *now* obscure; and we are oftentimes led to mistake the Apostles  
Meaning,



Meaning, by interpreting their Phrases and Customs according to those which are now in use among us. This cannot but occasion considerable Difficulty, even to the Learned, who are capable of consulting the Originals. It will more nearly affect the generality of *Christians*, who being destitute of this Light, are obliged, *in some measure*, to depend on the Faithfulness of the Translations, which will be more or less Exact, according to the different State of Learning in the Age or Nation wherein they were made, and the different Degrees of Integrity and Ability in the Translators. These Disadvantages cannot but render the Study of the Scriptures more difficult; and though all the important Doctrines or Duties of Revelation, are so plainly deliver'd in the Scriptures, as that no well-disposed Person can mistake them; yet, in other Matters, it will exercise our Diligence and Integrity to attain a clear Knowledge of Revelation, when we seek it in the best Manner, by consulting the Sacred Scriptures themselves. But that which is the greatest Unhappiness of all is this; that too many, instead of searching the *New Testament*, to learn from thence the Doctrines of the Gospel, are apt to content themselves with such Abstracts as have been compiled, sometimes by ignorant, sometimes by interested, always by fallible Men: And instead of making the Scriptures the Touchstone of these Human Compositions, have been fond of interpreting the Scriptures from them, as if *These* and not the Original Writings of the Apostles, were the Rule of our Faith. Hence many Opinions absurd, many insignificant, not a few pernicious, have been taught as the Doctrines of *Christianity*. And upon Account of these, the Gospel itself hath been called in question by some, and rejected by others.

others. Nor, indeed, is there any Thing which hath given so much the Appearance of Reason to the Objections which have been advanced by the Adversaries of *Christianity*, in these latter Ages, as the confounding the true Doctrines of Scripture with the Corruptions of Men; who, through Weakness or Wickedness, have represented Notions as Scriptural, which are not only without Foundation in the Scriptures, but directly contrary to them. All these Things have been observed by the best *Christian* Writers, and are by them properly applied as so many Arguments to a diligent critical Study of the Scriptures, and as fit Motives to the Exercise of Charity and mutual Forbearance, amidst a Diversity of Sentiments, which, upon this Account, must be supposed to arise even amongst the most honest and diligent Enquirers. But when our Author, borrowing from *Christian* Writers, what they intended for another Purpose, would make use of these same Arguments to subvert *Christianity* itself, and introduce an Universal Scepticism; it will be proper to examine whether the Premises will warrant such an extravagant Conclusion. Every discerning Person must at first Sight perceive, that this way of Reasoning, though directly level'd only against the Conveyance of the Doctrines and Facts of Scripture in Writing, will, if it has any Force at all in it, equally serve to invalidate the Evidence of all other ancient Doctrines or Facts whatsoever. By the same Method, all Profane as well as Sacred History will be render'd doubtful; and if, upon these Accounts, it be impossible for us in these Times to know what were the Sentiments or Actions of Christ and his Apostles; it will, for the same Reasons, be impossible for us to know (I use the Word in both Cases only for a Rational

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nal Persuasion) what were the Exploits of *Cæsar*, or the Sentiments of *Cicero*. The Actions of the former have been related by different Authors, with some Variation of Circumstances; and the Writings of the latter have suffer'd by the Ignorance or Negligence of Transcribers, (as the Sense of them hath been obscur'd and misrepresented by Comments and Abstracts and Translations) equally, to say the least, with any Part of the *New Testament*. The Adversaries of Revelation would therefore do well to consider how far they shall be carried; and to tell us, at least, in plain Terms, that we can have no Rational Evidence of the Credibility of any Ancient Fact or Sentiment whatsoever. But to consider this Matter more particularly with respect to the Scriptures. What Evidence we have that they are the genuine Productions of those to whom they are ascribed, has been consider'd already.

2. As to the various Readings, it has been demonstrated, that as this is no other than what is common to all other Books of which there are more Copies extant than One; so it is so far from weakening, that it strengthens the Opinion of their being genuine. That those Books of Antiquity, which have the greatest Number of Copies extant, and consequently the most various Readings, are now in the best Condition of all; and on the contrary, that those of which we have but one Copy, and consequently which have no various Readings, for want of more Copies to correct them by, are only a heap of Errors and Confusion. That amidst the Three Thousand various Readings which have been computed in the *New Testament*, the Sense of the Text is seldom alter'd by any of them; and that the Scheme of *Christianity*



unity is not in the least affected by any one of them (l).

3. As for the Credit of Translations; though these cannot be supposed perfect, (any more than the Translation of Modern Books from one living Language to another) yet even the Common People have very good Reason to believe that they are right *in the Main*. They may very well know, that they were made by Men who were reputed to understand the Languages which they were to translate; who had many Eyes upon them, and whose Honour was concern'd in the Case, and knew that, if they fail'd, their Ignorance or Mistakes would be expos'd to the World. This is very good Moral Evidence, and very far from an implicit Faith. Let me only suggest one Thing farther; that where a Translation is faulty, or doubtful, even a Common Person, by considering the Context, without the least Knowledge of the Original, may be able oftentimes to make an easy and true Judgment of the different Translations which may be proposed to him. Thus in our *English* Version, St. Paul, speaking of the Lord's Supper, is represented as saying, *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself* (m). In the Margin, for *Damnation* we read *Judgment*. And that *Judgment* (i. e. Temporal Judgment, such as Sickness and Death, which the Apostles had a Power of inflicting upon Transgressors) is the true rendring, any illiterate Person may see, by comparing it with what follows. *For this Cause many are*

(l) See more at large what is excellently observ'd by the Author of the Remarks on a Discourse of Free-Thinking, which I should have inserted here, if it had not been already done by Mr. Foster.

(m) 1 Cor. xi. 29.

*WEAK and SICKLY among you, and many SLEEP, i. e. Die. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should NOT be condemned with the World (n).*

4. The Difficulties arising from the variety of Interpretations, Allegories, Hyperboles, Metaphors, Types, Parables, Phrases of uncertain Signification, &c. are next to be consider'd. And as to these, I would beg Leave to observe, that all the great Doctrines or Duties of Revelation, which are at some Times represented in Figures and Parables, are at other Times plainly expressed in the most simple Manner; and that where there seems any Difficulty, the more obscure Passages should, by all the Rules of Criticism, be interpreted by the plainer ones, and not on the contrary: That all Writings and all Languages abound with Tropical and Metaphorical Expressions, which are easily apprehended: That if in the Books of the *Old and New Testament* there are some Expressions, the Sense of which at this Distance of Time cannot be assign'd, the Case is the same with all other Writings even of much less Antiquity; and should be no Objection, as long as the main Tenor of them is intelligible enough. And though it cannot be denied, that the Metaphors and Hyperboles of Scripture have in Fact been mistaken beyond those of all other ancient Writers; yet this has not been owing to any peculiar Obscurity in the Sacred Writings, but either to the absurd and preposterous Manner in which they have been studied, or else to the Knavery of some ambitious and designing Ecclesiasticks, who, in a dark and ignorant Age, wil-

(n) 1 Cor. xi. 30—32.

fully perverted the Holy Scriptures, to serve their imperious and tyrannical Designs. And it had been as easy for them to have interpreted *Plato* or *Tully* in the same absurd Manner, if that would equally have served their wicked Purposes. But if the Ignorant will be imposed on, and surrender up their Reason and Senses to the Crafty, it is their own Fault, and they must suffer the Consequences.

5. That the Scripture contains some Precepts which are Occasional only, obliging certain Persons, upon certain Occasions, and in certain Circumstances; and others that are of Eternal Obligation; is all very true. That it makes no Distinction in delivering *these*, is true only in Part (o). But supposing it to be universally true, what will be the harm, as long as Mankind by their own Reason are capable of seeing that Distinction themselves? not only from the Nature of the Precepts, (which indeed would carry Revelation very little farther than Natural Religion) but by perceiving whether the Reason, on which the Command is expressly said to be founded, extends to them; or whether the different Circumstances of Persons and Things does not alter the Obligation.

6. Whether ‘ had God from Time to Time  
 ‘ spoke to all Mankind in their several Languages,  
 ‘ and His Words had miraculously conveyed the  
 ‘ same Ideas to all Persons, He could not have  
 ‘ spoke more plainly than He has done by the  
 ‘ Things themselves, and the Relations which  
 ‘ Reason shews there is between them;’ provided  
 Mankind would take the Pains of attending to these Relations, and, by a long Train of Reasoning, deduce from these the whole Compass of their

(o) See Acts xv.



Duty ; I shall not dispute. Nor shall I nicely examine, whether the Proof of Revelation will not be as difficult to the Common People at this Distance of Time, as the making out the Principles of Morality by Reason. I think it sufficient Answer to this Objection to say with a late judicious Writer, ‘ That, notwithstanding, there would be great Advantage to Mankind, from the Proposal of a pure compleat Scheme of Morality, establish’d on the Authority of God. For those who lived in that Age would have the Advantage of seeing before their Eyes evident Proofs of such a Revelation which made Morality so clear, and so would have manifest Advantages beyond what they had before: And as to those that come after, though the Proof of Revelation be more intricate, yet there is a pure and compleat Scheme of Morality handed down to them, which, perhaps, they otherwise would never have had; and they may receive also from speculative Men, Proofs of the Reasonableness of it, and its Confirmation by Miracles. However, the bare Proposal of it is of Advantage to all, if for nothing else, yet as it may lead them to the Practice of the most useful Virtues, though their Practice be not establish’d on the most Rational Principles. But ’tis of special Advantage to those that will look into the Proof of it: Which all *may*’ (p). Upon the whole, it must be granted, that a written Rule of Morals will be of little Use, unless those to whom it is proposed, have some share of Reason to find out the Sense of it, and apply the General Precepts to Particular Cases, as well as to

(p) True Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion, Page 26, 27.

discern the Difference arising from the Variation of Circumstances. And if the Question was, [Whether of the two would be best for Mankind, to learn their Duty from their Natural Notions without a written Rule, or to have such a Rule and be divested entirely of these Natural Notions?] If this, I say, was the Question, it might be as easily resolved as if it should be asked, [Whether was best for a Man to have Common Sense, though he could neither Read nor Write, or to be able to Read and Write, but be destitute of Common Sense?] But the true Question, (if Men will understand it right) is, Whether with the common Abilities of Mind, which even the Vulgar enjoy, it is most likely they should have the best Knowledge of Morality, by a written Rule of Life, such as that contain'd in the *New Testament*, join'd with the common Dictates of their Reason; or by being left to trace out their Duty, without such a Guide, by the meer Strength of Natural Genius? The plain Reason of the Thing, or the comparing the Sentiments of the generality of *Christians* with the Moral Apprehensions of those who had nothing but Natural Light to direct them, will, I believe, easily inform any unprejudiced Person, in what manner such a Question ought to be answer'd.

XII. Having, as I apprehend, in the foregoing Pages overturned our Author's Premises, the Conclusion must fall of Course.

I shall therefore close this Controversy, by summing up, in a few Words, the Evidence on both Sides.

The Sum of the Argument against the Fitness and Usefulness of Revelation, is this—

‘ That there is in the Nature of Things a manifest Difference between Good and Evil: That  
‘ some

‘ some Things are in their own Nature Right  
 ‘ and others Wrong.—That the acting according  
 ‘ to this Moral Difference of Things, by avoid-  
 ‘ ing Evil and choosing Good, is acting accord-  
 ‘ ing to the great Law of Nature, in the Obser-  
 ‘ vation of which consists the whole of Natural  
 ‘ Religion.—That all Mankind, in all Times and  
 ‘ Places, by the Use of those Faculties which dis-  
 ‘ tinguish them from Brutes, *viz.* their Reason-  
 ‘ ing Powers, are capable of discovering this Law,  
 ‘ and acting accordingly.—That as the Divine  
 ‘ Being conforms Himself in all His own Actions  
 ‘ to the Fitness of Things; it must be supposed  
 ‘ to be His Will, that all His Reasonable Crea-  
 ‘ tures should make this the Rule of their Acti-  
 ‘ ons; and that as Sincerity in the Observation  
 ‘ of this Law is the only Thing that can rea-  
 ‘ sonably be thought to recommend Men to God,  
 ‘ so every equal Degree of it will entitle Men to  
 ‘ an equal Degree of His Favour.—That thus  
 ‘ the Law of Nature becomes a Law of God;  
 ‘ and, suitably to the Character of its Author,  
 ‘ must be supposed perfect and immutable, with-  
 ‘ out the least Defect, and incapable of having  
 ‘ any Thing added to it or taken from it.—That  
 ‘ to imagine God has made the Observation of  
 ‘ any other Law besides that of Nature, neces-  
 ‘ sary to the obtaining His Favour, is a detract-  
 ‘ ing from the Perfection and Immutability of  
 ‘ that Law, and consequently a Reflection on the  
 ‘ Deity, who is the Author of it.—That it is also  
 ‘ an high Reflection on the Wisdom of the Di-  
 ‘ vine Being, as well as upon His Goodness, to  
 ‘ suppose that He makes the Happiness of His  
 ‘ Creatures to depend on their abstaining from  
 ‘ any Thing Harmless, or the Practice of any  
 ‘ Thing Useless. That such positive, arbitrary  
 ‘ Precepts,



' Precepts, as they tend to give Men a very un-  
 ' worthy Opinion of the Deity, so they will give  
 ' an Handle to Human Impositions of all Sorts;  
 ' and can be of no Service but to feed that super-  
 ' stitious Humour too natural to the Bulk of Man-  
 ' kind, by which they are of themselves other-  
 ' wise enough disposed to substitute Positive Ob-  
 ' servances in the room of Morality, and for the  
 ' sake of Rituals to disturb the Peace of Society,  
 ' in order to introduce by Force what cannot be  
 ' brought in by Reason: A Humour which  
 ' ought always to be discountenanced in the most  
 ' effectual Manner.—That if it could be imagin'd  
 ' to be consistent with the Divine Wisdom and  
 ' Goodness, to make the Observation of any  
 ' Thing Positive, a necessary and indispensable  
 ' Term of Acceptance with him; such is the Im-  
 ' partiality and Bounty of the Common Parent  
 ' of the Universe, that He would certainly have  
 ' made known His Will in these Matters, by a  
 ' Revelation extending to all Times and Places;  
 ' and He would have thus discover'd His Will,  
 ' not grudgingly in Parcels, but at once.—That  
 ' as it is not pretended, nor can be proved, that  
 ' He hath made such a general Revelation; it  
 ' ought to be concluded, that the Law of Nature,  
 ' which alone is universally known, is alone of  
 ' universal Obligation upon all Mankind.—That  
 ' for these Reasons, if it should be allowed that  
 ' God might make known His Will to Mankind  
 ' by Revelation; such a Revelation could differ  
 ' from Natural Religion in nothing but in the  
 ' Manner of its Publication, and could be of no  
 ' other Service than to restore and revive the Re-  
 ' ligion of Nature, after it had been corrupted  
 ' through Ignorance and Superstition.—That if  
 ' Almighty God should be pleased to send a Pro-  
 ' phet

' phet into the World to republish the Law of  
 ' Nature ; as it would be impossible for Him to  
 ' add any Thing to that Law, so He could not  
 ' possibly give any greater Evidence to the Law  
 ' of Nature than it had before. It would carry  
 ' its Internal Evidence with it, and External  
 ' Evidence (since Miracles prove only Power, by  
 ' whomsoever they are wrought,) could add no-  
 ' thing at all to it. — That such an Interposition of  
 ' Providence for the Republication of the Law of  
 ' Nature, if it be at all supposed, must be re-  
 ' peated for the same Reason, as often as there is  
 ' a like Occasion for it : Otherwise it will only  
 ' be of present Service. And yet that such fre-  
 ' quent Interpositions might be of very ill Conse-  
 ' quence, and lay a Foundation for endless Super-  
 ' stitions and Enthusiasms.—But that if this Re-  
 ' velation is supposed to be made but once *viva*  
 ' *voce*, and then committed to Writing for the  
 ' Benefit of Posterity ; these Writings would la-  
 ' bour under the same Difficulties as if they had  
 ' been of Human Composure. The Copies will  
 ' be lost or corrupted, and the true Reading  
 ' hardly be recover'd. The Language will grow  
 ' obsolete, and difficult to be translated. The  
 ' Customs and Forms of Speech will be anti-  
 ' quated and obscured ; and thus, in a long Tract  
 ' of Time, it will be more easy, for the Learned  
 ' or Unlearned, to trace Natural Religion from  
 ' its first Principles, than to learn it from such  
 ' ancient Writings. And that it may be as easy  
 ' for Men, by the Exercise of their Reason, to  
 ' separate the Truth of Natural Religion from  
 ' the Corruptions introduced by unwritten Tra-  
 ' dition ; as in written Tradition to separate what  
 ' is Genuine from what is Spurious, after a long  
 ' and general Confusion of the one and of the  
 ' other,

' other, by the Use of the same Reason.—That  
 ' therefore, whatever small Advantages may be  
 ' conceiv'd to arise from the Interposition of a  
 ' Divine Revelation to restore the Religion of  
 ' Nature ; yet, as such an Interposition (unless  
 ' repeated on every the like Occasion) would be  
 ' of Service but for a little while ; and the Fre-  
 ' quency of such Interpositions might be attended  
 ' with worse Consequences, it is more rational  
 ' to suppose, that God should leave Mankind to  
 ' regain the perfect Knowledge of the Law of  
 ' Nature, by returning to the due Use of their  
 ' Reason, as they lost it by the Abuse of it ; in  
 ' the mean time making those gracious Allow-  
 ' ances for their unhappy Circumstances, which  
 ' He must be supposed to have done by those  
 ' who acknowledge Revelation, (unless they are  
 ' very uncharitable) to those that lived before  
 ' that Revelation was made.—That among all the  
 ' numberless pretended Revelations which have  
 ' appear'd in the World, there is not one which is  
 ' no other than a Republication of Natural Reli-  
 ' gion. That they all contain some Things con-  
 ' trary to, and others besides it. That this is the  
 ' Case of the Scriptures, is acknowledged by  
 ' *Christians* as well as others. That, consequent-  
 ' ly, they are no otherwise to be acknowledged  
 ' than as all other Human Writings, which, as  
 ' far as they appear consonant to Reason, are  
 ' alike to be received ; and that where they do  
 ' not, we must reject them all alike, and abide  
 ' by the Perfect, Immutable, Plain and Universal  
 ' LAW of NATURE, which is the ONLY LAW  
 ' of GOD. '

The Answer is this. That there is a Difference  
 in Things, according to which some are in their  
 own Nature Good and others Evil ; that the act-

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ing according to this Difference, by avoiding the Evil and choosing the Good, is the Law of Nature ; and that the Law of Nature is the Law of God ; are Principles unquestionable.

That all Mankind, by the Use of their Rational Faculties, are, *in some measure*, capable of discovering the Law of Nature ; is true : And that in all Ages and Nations, they have actually discover'd many Branches of it ; is a Fact attested by all History and Experience.

Farther yet ; that the Sincere Observance of the Law of Nature, as far as, considering the different Circumstances of Persons, it could reasonably be supposed to have been discover'd, will be accepted by God, and attended with a proportionable Reward, is, I think, highly agreeable to our Natural Notions of the Deity ; and in no Sense contrary to the Representations of Scripture, but rather the Reverse. The Consequence of which is plain, that the Knowledge of Revelation, is not, in all Cases, necessary to render Men acceptable to God ; but that Sincere Persons, who never enjoyed that Advantage, if they acted agreeable to the Light which they had, may be happy. And thus much also may, I think, be concluded from the want of an Universal Revelation ; which, had it been absolutely necessary, would never have been withheld by the Common Parent of Mankind from any of his Children. But notwithstanding these Concessions, which cannot, I imagine, be deny'd, without contradicting plain Fact, or impeaching the Moral Perfections of the Deity ; the Wisdom, and Fitness of Revelation, may, I doubt not, plainly be evinced. Whatever Human Reason, abstractly consider'd, is capable of discovering, it is certain that the Law of Nature was, for many Ages, very imperfectly

fectly known, and greatly corrupted. It is as clear as History can make it, that this was the Case when *Christianity* first appear'd in the World: And whatever Allowances may be made by God, for the unhappy Circumstances of His Creatures, the want of understanding and practising Virtue, will, in the Nature of Things, be a Loss of some Happiness. Let us then suppose, that the Gospel had really only been a Republication of the Law of Nature; even in this View it will not appear unworthy of a Divine Original. And if the Sacred Author of it exhibited a perfect Example of Righteousness in his own Life, at the same Time that in his Preaching he gave a perfect Scheme of Morality; and, to engage the greater Attention, perform'd such Works as exceeded all Human Power; each of these Things must have been of great Service to the Cause of Virtue; and have produced a very different Face of Things in the World. If we suppose farther, that the Author of this Scheme of Morality took Care that it should be committed to Writing; the Benefit of this Republication would be extended to distant Ages and Nations, to whom it might be conveyed in a great Degree of Purity, though subject to the Inconveniences common to other ancient Writings. And though the Proof of the Genuineness of such Writings, and the Interpretation of them, will, at a great Distance of Time, be less plain, especially to the Vulgar; yet even *These* may have equal Evidence of the Truth and Meaning of these Writings, as they generally have of the Nature and Evidence of Natural Religion, or as they are reasonably content with as to Writings of Human Authority.

Thus useful would Revelation be, if it was indeed no more than a Republication of the Law

of Nature. But the Advantages of it may be carried much farther. From the Perfection and Immutability of the Law of Nature, consider'd as the Law of God, there is no Reason to conclude that Revelation can add nothing to or take nothing from it: And to suppose the Perfection or Immutability of that Law, *in this Sense*, is a plain begging the Question. That Revelation cannot contradict the Law of Nature, is granted: But that it may not improve upon Natural Light, hath not been made out. If Revelation added no new Precepts, it might be of great Service by adding new Sanctions to the Law of Nature, by giving Mankind a greater, more clear, and distinct Knowledge of the Future State. Or it might add to Natural Religion, the Discovery of such Truths, (otherwise not to be known) as will furnish out new Motives to Virtue. Such as are the Scripture Doctrine concerning the first Entrance of Death into the World, and the Restoration of Immortality; the Advantage of a compleat Example of Virtue; and the Method in which *Christianity* teacheth Men to expect the Forgiveness of Sins.

Nor is there any Absurdity in supposing, that Revelation introduces some additional Positive Precepts. Provided, (which ought always to be understood) that though the particular Circumstances of these may be merely Positive, yet the general Tendency of them is evidently serviceable to Morality; that they are not so numerous as to overload the Mind; that they are always placed in Subordination to Morality, and never made to stand in Competition with it: Which is notoriously the Case, as to all the Positive Institutions of the Gospel, *viz.* Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Mediatorial Worship, &c. The Observance of  
these



these Things in the Manner *Christianity* requires, has been found, by the Experience of Multitudes of Virtuous Persons, highly serviceable to Morality. No *Person of Probity* can be encouraged, from the Representation of Scripture, to substitute these in the room of weightier Matters, and against Perverseness there is no Security. The Natural Disposition of Mankind to Superstition is so far from being encouraged by the Gospel, that it is in the most effectual Manner discountenanced. Not only by the most express Declarations concerning the Nature of true Religion; but the strictest Prohibition of Mens adding to the Positive Precepts of Divine Authority, any others of Human Invention. Whatever is wanting of Internal Evidence in the Additions made by Revelation to the Sanctions, Motives, or Precepts of Natural Religion; may be compensated by External Evidence, *viz.* Manifestations of more than Human Knowledge or Power in the Publishers of these Things. And though this Proof is not, indeed, in the Nature of Demonstration, (since we cannot *certainly* say how far the Powers of superior Beings may extend, or be permitted,) yet, in the Circumstances above-mention'd, and in Conjunction with a Doctrine in its general Tendency calculated to promote Holiness, there is the highest moral Evidence, that they are, directly, or indirectly, the Effects of a Divine Interposition.

In a Word, though all these Additions to the Law of Nature would, perhaps, have been needless, if the Reason of Mankind *had been perfect*, and the Force of Appetite and Passion less strong, (upon which Account Revelation itself supposes they will cease to be obligatory in the Future State;) yet, in the present Condition of Humanity,

nity, beset on every Side with Temptations, they will, I doubt not, be found admirable Instruments of Holiness; and we shall be so far from rejecting Revelation upon the Account of them, (if we consider Things calmly) that we shall value it the more for the Assistance which it brings to our Infirmities. And without the least detracting from the Religion of Nature, we may be thankful for the Support it has evidently receiv'd from the Sacred Scriptures, which are able to make us all wise unto Salvation.

This I apprehend to be a satisfactory Answer to the Objection; and the true State of this Controversy. For a Conclusion, I beg Leave to borrow the Words of a late excellent Prelate upon an Occasion not much unlike (q). ‘ I have made  
 ‘ very fair War with such as are Adversaries to  
 ‘ Reveald Religion, allowing them all that they  
 ‘ can ask in the Matter before us. I have made  
 ‘ such Concessions, as, by unconsidering People,  
 ‘ will, it may be, be suspected sooner than approved; but I have ever thought this was the  
 ‘ way of dealing with them, or, if not so, that I,  
 ‘ at least, was not a Man to deal with them.

(q) Dr. Fleetwood's Epistle Dedicatory to his Essay upon Miracles.

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